

# **Considerations on the History of Cambodia From the Early Stage to the Period of Democratic Kampuchea**

**By Khieu Samphan**

## **Chapter 5**

### **Democratic Kampuchea**

As they always say now, there are very many problems concerning the Khmer Rouge issue: this also makes me very depressed and upset.

It is true that our country must now face the inheritance of serious grudges and fear as a result of a revolution that changed in unpredictable ways to become the most absolute of revolutions, one that caused a profound upheaval of society the likes of which have never before been seen.

However, we should also ponder whether a revolution like the Khmer Rouge revolution that had once broken the greedy ambitions of major and intermediate great powers could have been an act committed by a single person or a small group of people. That certainly could not be true. Many tens of thousands and hundreds of thousands of people followed this revolution, and they did not hesitate to sacrifice their lives for the revolutionary cause. So then, probably there was something they had been lacking something for a long time, something they needed very much in order to live. So the question that arises is: Why did this revolution occur like that and at that time? To me, the answer is obvious.

Revolutions occur after decisive historical events in reaction to historical problems. They bring about killing, but they arise from previous killing. As for the previous killing, when we just look at Samlaut, we understand.

General opinion, both Cambodian and international, says, "If it had not been for the Vietnam War, Cambodia probably would have continued on for many more years like it had in the 1960s." The Khmer Rouge would have remained a strong rebel movement that the royal government of Sihanouk would have been able to eliminate, but the Khmer Rouge would not have had sufficient forces to take power." The above-mentioned opinion points to a specific historical event, the Vietnam War. Thus, it points to the intervention of the United States of America in this region. So then, this point is correct.

In tandem with the Vietnam War, what other events occurred? There was the suppression of the peasant rebellion in Samlaut and the resultant bloodbath. Did the

cutting the throats of the peasants, the beheading their fathers or relatives, the burning of their houses, and the plundering of their property set their hearts afire? So then, the flames of rage were set alight among the peasants. Then came the coup that overthrew Norodom Sihanouk, dissolved the national policy of neutrality, and dragged Kampuchea down into the flames of the Vietnam War. So then, the flames of rage set alight in other strata of the nation in combination with the rage of the peasants became a national rage, like the great demonstrations in Kampong Cham and Takeo made clear in great detail.

What other events occurred? Vietnamese resistance forces struck and penetrated throughout Cambodia. They came because American forces were chasing them. But they also came because they wanted to act as they had acted during earlier eras; they wanted to act as teachers and be a protectorate over Cambodia. Their activities had always cast a bad influence inside Cambodian society and on the Cambodian resistance. They caused a recurrence of the old disease of dependence on Vietnam that had previously plagued the Cambodian resistance, and they caused dissention within the movement on the tactics of resistance. One leaning understood that moderate resistance was enough and it was better to wait for the Vietnamese to be victorious, and then they come to help liberate us. Another leaning clearly understood the old Vietnamese greed and wanted us to struggle alone with independence and mastery. These were the preconditions that led to Vietnam sticking its hands deep into the CPK to stir it up internally and gather up the people they had built during the Viet Minh era and use them strike the forces that were striving to struggle with independence and mastery. Even after the liberation of the country they still used those people of theirs to create complications above and beyond those that already existed, this in tandem with their invasion from the outside.

If we look at the Khmer Rouge movement from its origins, we see a long process to strive to liberate us from the protectorate that Vietnam had imposed on us ever since the war against the French. Both in terms of ideology and organization, it was a process that tried to be extremely patient, because this movement clearly understood the necessity of solidarity with the Vietnamese Party and people to prevent a negative impact on the joint struggle for national liberation. However, since the situation in Kampuchea was unlike that in Vietnam, and since Vietnam insisted on coercing Kampuchea to follow a path appropriate to the interests of the Vietnamese struggle but which might endanger the Khmer Rouge movement, when the Khmer Rouge did not obey the Vietnamese, they saw us as unreliable allies. This was the root of the problems between Kampuchea and Vietnam. Thus, by 1975 the Khmer Rouge movement appeared as a patriotic movement that had broad support and sympathy from the nation and the people with the cooperation of nearly every strata of society in Phnom Penh and in the provincial towns. So then, this gave the nation a lot of experience. The nation is able study this experience from an historic period; it should not reject it. If mistakes were made later on, they certainly could not have been crimes of auto-genocide. We should consider those mistakes meticulously. That that this movement struggled against and defeated the great power such as America and an intermediate power such as Vietnam and did not allow Kampuchea to be taken into an Indochina Federation means that it was a brave and audacious patriotic movement, but one that had the capability not just to fight but to formulate strategy and successfully implement strategy successfully in the face of overwhelming odds.

Suddenly, in 1975, they turned instead to a policy that seemed to oppose the people in the cities and the provincial towns. Why was that? We will try to make an assessment of this issue.

So then, we will divide this Chapter 5 into two major parts:

Part One examines the history of the CPK up until 1975.

Part Two attempts to consider and research the answers to a number of questions that arose after 1975.

Though I am not a historian and do not have the possibility of doing the research in person, my understanding is that I may be able to accomplish the above-mentioned goal based on my general views on this movement, and what I do not know, I can fill in with what researchers have discovered. Even though it is true that researchers have misunderstood many issues, and these misunderstandings are not minor ones, what they have discovered is very valuable.

I have faith in my own general views on the movement based on two things:

First, I travelled with the movement for 30 years, and I passed through many twists and turns, many times, sometimes at the peril of my life.

Second, I personally knew many heroes unknown to others, cadres, combatants male and female, the beloved children of the peasants, who sacrificed their lives for the cause of the nation and the cause of social justice that they so loved and desired.

# Part One

## The early history of the CPK up until 1975

In this Part One, I will describe in detail the efforts to build a Party independent in terms of ideology, political line, and force organization by training peasants to fight on the actual battlefield from the late 1950s, the early 1960s, on until the middle of the 1970s. When reading this, it may seem that I support the acts of violence such as the killings of commune chiefs, forestry officials, fishery officials, etc, and even civil war. In fact, I want to show how the Khmer Rouge leadership turned frightened peasants afraid of the “big guys” into a resistance force that struggled on its own and was independent of Vietnam. I learned all this by reading documents and from cadres in the Southwest Zone who told me. In fact, in both China and Vietnam, revolutionary leaders also did the same to make the peasants learn “class struggle” and become a mighty revolutionary force. But when Viet Minh forces came to Cambodia, they did not train the Khmer peasantry to struggle independently. They left it to Cambodians to rely upon them and be their subordinates to be used as they pleased only to fight and die in the service of their Indochina Federation strategy. We saw in Chapter Three that some of the Cambodian resistance were put in place as decorations to act as commanders, but it was left up Vietnamese deputy commanders to manage everything. Some were unhappy about this, but some were happy to be “big guys” without having to struggle. So then, this is why the cadres that emerged from the “Nine-Year War” were under strong Vietnamese influence. This was because the efforts to struggle with “independence and mastery” that we will see below demanded endurance of serious hardships, suffering, and sacrifice of life. However, had we not strived to build a Party independent from Vietnam based upon the forces of Kampuchean peasants, Kampuchea would have fallen into the hands of Vietnam after the 1970 coup. There would have been no negotiations, no Paris Agreements, no UNTAC, no present Kampuchea.

So then, this is why I wish to provide the following account. Most of my description comes from the books of researchers, the titles and the authors of which I will identify.

### **A. After the Viet Minh left, everything that they had organized for the Cambodians was dissolved.**

This was for three reasons:

One, the quiet suppression campaigns by the state authorities of Norodom Sihanouk.

Two, the Vietnamese themselves, who had created the movement, had their hands full with many other issues.

A “Working Committee” was created by the Southern Office that would later become The Central Office for the South in order to make contact with the Cambodians.<sup>74</sup> But by late 1950 there was a strong suppression campaign by the Ngo Dinh Diem administration, and the “Working Committee” was very busy with the protection of their leadership.

When speaking of this afterwards, Saloth Sar said that this was a good opportunity for us “because it would allow us to have a free hand and we might be able to strengthen and expand the movement by ourselves.” In truth, for a small group of communists to strive to live miserably on its own in a regime that had only just begun armed combat was not as easy as he said.

The third reason was the fundamental one, the identity crisis of the Party that the Vietnamese had organized and left behind for Cambodia. How could they be called communists if they were members of a Party that was not even a Communist Party? In 1951, the Party Statute clearly stated that the aim was “to carry out firm and resolute struggle to smash French colonialism, American imperialists, and their servants.”<sup>75</sup> After 1954, the majority of the membership of the Party understood that their mission was completed because the country was independent, and they went back home.

Speaking about the general situation at that time, Ben Kiernan wrote, “That era was characterized by the unpredictable but welcome development of Sihanouk’s increasingly independence stance, and by the loss of revolutionary momentum caused by the election defeat and [the KPRP’s] not having prepared a spirit of class struggle.”<sup>76</sup>

We have already spoken in Chapter Four about development of Norodom Sihanouk, but what I want to clarify is that the words of Ben Kiernan when he spoke about the lose of morale of the former revolutionaries and about the Kampuchean Party that was created at that time. These few words of Ben Kiernan make it clear that Vietnam did not want the Cambodians that were fighting along with them at the time, even important cadres, to understand anything at all other than waiting for Vietnamese orders. The Party did not know what Party it was. It said it was a revolutionary party, but it was “without any prepared spirit of class struggle” for the members. The outcome was that without the Vietnamese communist, they did not know what to do. They had struggled to fight a regime by force of arms, and afterwards the circumstances required that they lay down their arms and return home. This was truly ignorant.

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<sup>74</sup> Philip Short, “Pol Pot”, page 121

<sup>75</sup> Ben Kiernan, “How Pol Pot Came to Power”, page 171

<sup>76</sup> Ben Kiernan, “How Pol Pot Came to Power”, page 171

In 1954, when thousands of the Cambodian resistance dressed in Viet Minh military uniforms and boarded boats for Hanoi, they did not even know why they were going there. Even Son Ngoc Minh, whom they had solemnly declared to be the father of the Cambodian revolution, went to Hanoi. How could the leader of a national revolution leave the country like this and still lead a revolution inside his country? Siv Heng, who was appointed Party Secretary after Son Ngoc Minh, decided to go to Hanoi: he understood that there was no reason to struggle on after independence. When this is the understanding of the Party Secretary, what kind of Party was this? In the end, he surrendered to Lon Nol. When the Secretary of a “revolutionary party” surrenders, what is left?

As for Saloth Sar, Mei Măn, and Chăn Samân, they did not go anywhere. They went to Krabao with Pham Van Ba, the representative of Nguyễn Thanh Sơn in the Geneva Convention Implementation Inspection Committee called CIC, to return to Phnom Penh on foot, pretending to be going to Chau Doc with the others, but wandering back and forth to cover their tracks. Previously, Pham Van Ba had always taught the Cambodians that the Vietnamese, Lao, and Cambodian people were as close as lips and teeth. Now, he told his three companions along the way, “The armed struggle is over. Comrades, you must carry out political struggle instead.” That seemed reasonable, but the three travelers could not come up with an answer about exactly what they were to do. The three comrades discussed this along the road, but could find no answer at all.

Around late 1955, the Vietnamese communist leadership sent official guidance to the Cambodians to remind them that the armed struggle was over and Cambodians must continue the “political struggle.”

These instructions were the first example of the opportunism of the Vietnamese Workers Party. After Norodom Sihanouk’s victory in the 1955 elections, the Vietnamese communists immediately concluded that it would be a loss and no gain whatsoever for them if they continued to support the Cambodians that had followed them for so many years after the war against the French. So then, they were simply afraid. They feared that the Cambodian struggle would not be able to tolerate the suppression from Sihanouk and would not return to their villages, but would continue on the path of armed resistance.

One humorous thing was that before preparing this letter of instruction to the Cambodians, the Vietnamese communist leaders did not concentrate on asking about the Cambodians’ situation at their locations. There was not one word. So then, the Cambodian party they did not even want to be bothered to hear about or know where the Cambodian party had scattered to. To them, the Cambodians were under their command and did not have the right to say anything at all. In the future we would see this type of view, this type of attitude, even more clearly.

Perhaps he was thinking of these instructions when David Chandler wrote the following observation: “It was that period when the Vietnamese communists advised their Cambodian colleagues to “struggle politically,” which in actuality was like sending

their activists in to the police.”<sup>77</sup> His opinion was that even on this, the Cambodians seemed to respect and obey. In truth, the Cambodian party had totally dissolved. The members did not even dare raise their heads near the villages.

At that time, Tou Samuth, number two in the provisional Central Committee that the Viet Minh had established before they left Kampuchea, after waiting for the typhoon of election propaganda to quiet a bit, snuck into Phnom Penh. He lived in a little shack that Saloth Sar had built for him and a plot of land owned by the mother of Khieu Ponnary, his wife, in Tuol Svay Prey in southwestern Phnom Penh.<sup>78</sup>

He was the sole active member among the five members of the provisional Central Committee of the Cambodian party that the Vietnamese had organized before they left Cambodia. In principle, he was Chairman of the Party’s City Committee, which from the beginning which was composed of Nuon Chea after he replaced Keo Meas who had to go be a member of the Pracheachon Group and Saloth Sar, Mei Măn, and Chăn Samân. But after a while, Mei Măn and Chăn Samân abandoned that work. So then, only three remained: Tou Samuth, Saloth Sar, and Nuon Chea.

Because of his Buddhist training and his quiet personality, he received the sympathy of Tou Samuth from the time they first met at Krabao. At the request of Tou Samuth, Saloth Sar became the aide who helped him prepare political studies for cadres. Gradually, almost unwittingly, Sar became Tou Samuth’s secretary and important aide during the next five years.<sup>79</sup>

Nuon Chea joined the communist movement by a different path than all the others. When he was two years old, he and the older brother of Saloth Sar grew up in Battambang. When that province fell under Thai governance sometime around 1940, he went to study in intermediate school in Bangkok, and he did some minor work in the Thai Foreign Ministry for a while before registering at Thammasart University, where he studied law. At that time, he became a member of the Thai Communist Party, but he resigned sometime around late 1940 to go with his cousin Siv Heng to the headquarters of the Northwest Zone in the mountains in Samlaut District not very far from Pailin. At that time, he was transferred to the Indochinese Communist Party, and in September 1951, he was assigned as a member of the Central Committee of the Kampuchean People’s Revolutionary Party, which had just been created. Shortly afterwards, he was sent to study at the highest level school of the party in Vietnam. In 1955, he secretly returned to Kampuchea and found work at a commercial company that subsequently became his refuge.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> David Chandler, “Brother Number One”, page 56

<sup>78</sup> Philip Short, “Pol Pot ...”, page 119; David Chandler, “Brother Number One”, page 54

<sup>79</sup> Philip Short, “Pol Pot ...”, page 100

<sup>80</sup> Philip Short, “Pol Pot ...”, page 120

**B. Moving toward the creation of a Cambodian Party that was an ally, but no longer a subordinate under Vietnamese command.**

Beginning in 1957, the three of them met regularly at Tou Samuth's house two or three times a week to discuss the political situation and to find means to make the previously movement rise again. In this work Tou Samuth went all-out without fear of fatigue.

However, contacts between those in Phnom Penh and the various networks in the countryside encountered serious difficulties because of the suppression campaigns and the loss of morale of the veteran members of the struggle.

Some fled into the forests far from villages, and in some cases they were out of contact for years before reconnecting to the Party. For example, in 1960, Saloth Sar had to go seek out veteran members of the resistance in the forest in Krauch Chhmar District. They lived by making and selling charcoal.

For these reasons, the three leaders agreed that it was necessary to set up a new political program and new statutes in order to create a new Cambodian party to replace the old party, a party that was still an ally but was no longer under the command of Vietnam.

One important factor that led to this idea was probably the fact that at that time the Châmraen Vichea School, where Saloth Sar had taught since he had come out of the forest, and two other progressive schools in Phnom Penh, Kampucheabotr and Sotàn Preichea En, were attracting more and more students who were sympathetic to the cause of the struggle. Cores gradually began to appear.

There were also cores at state schools like the Lycee Sisovath and the School of Pedagogy and in the alumni associations of both those schools. Ben Kiernan wrote: "During the next ten years, students from those three schools provided the majority of the leftist activists in the country. Most of them were teachers in rural schools, and they strived to make their students awaken to politics ... But the most important thing at that time was that because of those three schools, the Cambodian communists began to enter the families of the middle class in Phnom Penh. Therefore, in tandem with the influence of some the remaining communists in some locations in the countryside from wartime, in the capitol city, these circles had the strongest feelings of opposition against the royalty (in the language of the communists, opposition to the feudalists). These feelings occurred in part due to events during the 1955 elections and from the dissolution of the Democratic Party, and in part due to locations being left open and abandoned for the communists because Son Ngoc Thanh had refused to enter Phnom Penh and he had joined a more and more overt alliance with the United States of America and because of some opportunists with the Democratic Party that fled to Sihanouk's Sangkum Reastr Niyum and some others who were inactive, such as Pach Chheun, who went to work as Director of the



National Library. As for Keng Vannsak, he understood political change was impossible because “Cambodians fear the monarchy too much.” He, like everyone else, abandoned political activity, and he turned to trying for cultural change, hoping that gradually he could alter “the way of thinking” of the people and that would provide a foundation for modern politics.”<sup>81</sup>

Therefore, while in June and July 1957 the movement was not yet widespread at all, it had stopped falling further, at least in Phnom Penh.<sup>82</sup> It was then that Tou Samuth and Nuon Chea began to understand the role of the new movement and began to understand that this new blood might help provide spiritual strength to the former peasant cadres who at the time were lost and without hope.

For the Cambodian communists, the social or political conflicts that routinely occurred were a seedbed for training new cores how to lead the masses in struggle. They led the masses in struggle from low to high, and even higher. They did not fear the dangers. They only selected those who had already been tested to become members of the Party. This was what was called “building the Party from within the movement.” In addition to this, they concentrated on and emphasized to the cores that emerged from the students or teachers to make them clearly understand that it was the peasants who were the forces that could lead the revolution to victory, in particular the poor peasants. Thus, they had to strive to be close to the peasants and be polite to them, so that they would believe that we their friends, their equals, so that we could enlighten them to see their own strength. As for us, we strived to learn from them, to find their strong points, like their toleration of hardship and suffering, starvation and hunger, and strived to equip ourselves with those strong points by striving to eradicate “petty bourgeois” tendencies from ourselves. In truth, revolutionary intellectuals were the natural allies of the peasants, and when they tempered themselves inside the struggle, hardship, and suffering, they did not fear death. They could abandon their original class stances and equip themselves with peasant-class stances instead. As for the peasants, they gradually built themselves inside the movement and gradually studied and learned inside the movement of criticism/self-criticism, from low to high. They cast off “petty bourgeois” stances and stayed close to one or two small rice paddies to build the “proletarian-class” stances of daring to fight and daring to sacrifice.

They trained those cores to know how to join with all their various allies, even though they might be temporary allies, in order to isolate the enemy. In Kampuchea, the most important enemy at that time was the United States of America, because the United State of America was carrying out activities to destroy the policy of independent and neutrality of the nation. However, that does not mean that they had to stick with allies in the Front that were from the various other classes forever, because they had the missions of leading the revolution to advance toward attacking and overthrowing the feudalists, eliminating social injustice, and setting up a socialist regime.

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<sup>81</sup> Ben Kiernan, *How Pol Pot Came to Power*, page 177

<sup>82</sup> Philip Short, “Pol Pot ...”, page 123

On the organizational side, the fundamental units were the Branches, each of which had just three to six persons “with iron discipline, which all voluntarily accepted” and which “had to do constant criticism and self-criticism to strengthen and expand their proletarian stances.” (Later, these words were used to educate me too. I wish to use them at this time so that you can see the atmosphere inside the movement at that time.) They did not allow one Branch to know about another. Only the Branch Secretary knew the person directly in charge up above. During each Branch meeting, they never forgot to emphasize the importance of the secrecy provisions. The three leaders did not go to Branch meetings with the others, but there was a Branch at the summit separately for them that had the same discipline as the other Branches, including criticism and self-criticism. Aside from this, there were narrow-framework meetings in houses with the best security for training and indoctrinating the strongest cores to be even stronger in terms of ideology, political line, and organization.

Their intention was to convene an Assembly in 1968 [sic], but the Vietnamese, whose agreement the Cambodians still needed, were slow in responding out of suspicion that the Cambodians might find a means to separate themselves from them.<sup>83</sup> But in the end, the Vietnamese agreed that the present structure that segregated the rural areas from the cities had to be changed and they agreed that an Assembly could be convened during the second half of 1959. It was then that they got the news that Siv Heng, the Party Secretary, had been a traitor since some unknown date. So then, the primary issue was taking measures to protect against the damage becoming too major: everything else had to be put aside for a while.

Tou Samuth, Nuon Chea, Saloth Sar, and a fourth person, probably Sao Phim, created a “General Affairs Committee” to lead the movement throughout the country until the selection of new leadership. So, in a gradual evolution the City Committee became the Central Committee.<sup>84</sup> This development, together with the capabilities of Saloth Sar and various other progressive intellectuals that had just returned from France and knew how to make the student youth of various origins in the city and the countryside become politically aware, became an important factor in their rise of influence within the Party. This is why Saloth Sar inducted Ieng Sary and Vorn Vet and another city person that he had gotten to know at Krabao to help with the work in the Phnom Penh City Committee.

### **C. The 1960 Congress was the first important step toward a political line of independence.**

Regardless of the difficulties, the draft Statutes and political program that were prepared by the three members of the leadership were sent to the various Branches of the Party in early 1960 along with the “qualifications for consideration for induction into the Party”.<sup>85</sup> When I spoke casually with veteran members of the struggle, they said that Saloth Sar played an important role in the preparation of the Statutes and political

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<sup>83</sup> Philip Short, “Pol Pot ...”, page 135

<sup>84</sup> Philip Short, “Pol Pot ...”, page 135

<sup>85</sup> Philip Short, “Pol Pot ...”, page 135

program, but the influence of Tou Samuth and Nuon Chea among the veteran peasant cadres was of great importance in gathering up cadres like Sao Phim, Keo Meas, Ros Nhim, Kè Pok, and Mok, and in the Party taking root quickly in the countryside.

The new party was named the “Workers Party of Kampuchea.” According to what Ieng Sary told Philip Short, this name was known only to those who attended the Assembly. It was not recorded in the political program or the Statutes, which only spoke of the Kampuchean Party. As for the Vietnamese, they only knew of the former name, the People’s Revolutionary Party of Kampuchea (KPRP). They designated this party as a party of the workers which took Marxism-Leninism as its foundation and which lived close to the masses and was organized on the foundation of centralized democracy using criticism/self-criticism as its leadership principle.

As for who the worker class was at that time, that was not very clear, but in a backward agricultural country that had no industrial proletarian class, it was very hard to find clearer term than this. Saloth Sar, who had read books in Paris, also knew that in China they were not so strict with this term and it was the same in Vietnam.

Class analysis in Kampuchean society was not so very different than in China or Vietnam. The aim of the political program was to nationalize all means of production ... to active people’s democratic dictatorship and move on to building socialism based on the foundation of the slogan “Under the dictatorship of the people, in order to re-set the direction toward Communism.”

In a letter to the Cambodian leadership in late 1959, the Vietnamese Party recalled the policy that required supporting the regime of Sihanouk that they had brought up four years earlier. As the Vietnamese understood it, their view showed up again in the ideas of Khrushchev regarding “The parliamentary road to socialism” that were raised during the 20<sup>th</sup> Party Congress of the Soviets in Moscow one year later.

The important idea was that in an era of coexistence between two blocks, the Communist Party might advance toward taking power through elections without any need for class struggle and without the use of revolutionary violence. As for Saloth Sar, after the Cambodian Party’s experiences during 1955 and 1958, he saw that these words were hollow. But for the Vietnamese, these words were a very useful weapon to force the Cambodians to stay still (Because the Cambodian party is a small one: why do they dare to claim that the world communist movement is wrong?)<sup>86</sup> Since 1956, Siv Heng, with the moral support of Vietnam, strived to explain to his colleagues and give them cause to strive to prepare for elections without preparing class struggle. Siv Heng attracted many cadres that had formerly cooperated with Vietnam, among them Sao Phim. A number of cadres who came from France also leaned toward this because of their having been influenced by the French Communist Party.

In January 1959, the Central Committee of the Vietnamese Workers’ Party authorized the re-start of armed struggle in South Vietnamese “on the grounds that the

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<sup>86</sup> Philip Short, “Pol Pot ...”, page 136

Ngo Dinh Diem government was “the tool of American aggression and the yoke of enslavement”<sup>87</sup> The author’s reference to Duy William Dukor “The Vietnamese Communist Road to Power”. In late 1960, rebellion exploded in South Vietnam, and in mid September the Third Congress of the Vietnamese Workers Party agreed to wage general guerilla war in South Vietnam. Also at that time, armed struggle started up again in Laos. Thus, it was very hard for the Cambodians to understand why they alone had to implement a theory that even their own allies did not respect.

Two weeks after the VWP Congress ended, a 21-person delegation came to meet at the house of Aok Sokun, a member of the north part of Phnom Penh of Vorn Vet, (a member of the Cercle Marxiste in France) who held an important post with the Cambodian railway, in a villa near the railroad station. To avoid notice, the delegation arrived one at a time or in small groups, and Sokun placed guards to signal whenever outsiders approached. They met for three days, from 30 September until 2 October. There is no surviving documentation of the discussions at that time, and probably no documentation was ever made.

However, the program that the meeting approved was a very important first step aimed at a line of independence. Six years later, after a long but extremely patient process and constant vigilance to prevent the Vietnamese from becoming angry but always aimed at independence from Vietnam, at the inevitable turning point, the Cambodian Party could no longer follow the path upon which the Vietnamese Party insisted. Continuing to follow that path was suicide. It was then that the Party took the name “Communist Party of Kampuchea” (CPK), the meaning of which was independence from the Vietnamese Party. The Vietnamese did not immediately learn of this name. Only when their activities became visible as a clear separate national revolutionary movement did the Vietnamese learn of it.

#### **D. The new line of the new Party.**

This line specified that the “exploiting classes” were the primary enemy of the Cambodian revolution and “the tools of the American imperialists.” Thus, the Cambodian people had to smash the “feudalist regime” whether by peaceful methods or by other methods.

“The Kampuchean revolution has to choose between two forms of struggle: peaceful means or non-peaceful means. We will strive to do everything that can be done to grasp tightly the form of peaceful struggle, because this form does not cause too great a loss of life of the people. However, we must be ready at all times to use non-peaceful means if the imperialists and the feudalists ... are stubborn and force us to use those means ... If at any time the enemies of the revolution forces us to take up arms by ourselves, the countryside will provide us with excellent preconditions. Accordingly, the revolution must utilize these buried preconditions to build, strengthen, and expand the forces in the countryside ... The countryside is an important foundation for the revolution

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<sup>87</sup> Philip Short, “Pol Pot ...”, page 136 (the author’s reference to Duy William Dukor “The Vietnamese Communist Road to Power”)

because in Kampuchea as in other countries that have not yet prospered, national revolution is peasant revolution. The city ... is the apparatus of the power-holding classes and the imperialists, the location where the enemies of the revolution may assemble their forces to smash us.”<sup>88</sup>

Since the Cambodian stance was prepared with cautious wording like this, the Vietnamese communists did not know what to do other than to respond with soft, flexible wording. The Vietnamese document written later to the Kampuchean leadership only asked that the Kampuchean leadership be patient and promised that after South Vietnam and Laos achieved victory, “the Kampuchean revolution will also be victorious.”<sup>89</sup>

There were many points of disagreement. For example, the new party did not speak of Indochinese solidarity, but instead said, “Strive to achieve full independence, build a national economy, and establish an independent, sovereign, and prosperous Kampuchean nation.”

The Congress selected a new leadership group. Tou Samuth became Party Secretary. Nuon Chea became his deputy. Saloth Sar was number three. All three were full-rights members of the Standing Committee of the Central Committee. Ieng Sary, Sao Phim, and Màng, who was then Secretary of the Southwest Zone, were candidate members of the Standing Committee who had the right to participate in discussions in the Committee but no voting rights.

The 1960 Congress was the first Congress in which the Cambodians selected their own leaders and freely determined their strategy and tactics without a Vietnamese protectorate. Previously such decisions were instead made by the “Working Committee for Kampuchea” chaired by Nguyễn Thanh Sơn.<sup>90</sup> This time, not only was there not a single member of any Vietnamese Party delegation in attendance, but also the Party program, while it was written with careful thought was given to the reaction of Hanoi, was not presented to Hanoi for advance agreement.

To clearly denote the start of the new journey, all members of the movement had to resubmit their applications to join the Party.<sup>91</sup>

After the Congress met, they all seemed to have new energy and they rushed back to their respective locations to try to build the rural base areas that would be the key to the future of the Party if, as the Standing Office [sic] had clearly stated, peaceful measures “proved fruitless.” Màng and Praseth immediately returned to the Southwest. Ros Nhim abandoned his rice paddies south of Battambang to go re-organize networks of former Issarak surrounding Samlaut. Sao Phim returned to the East Zone.

<sup>88</sup> Philip Short, “Pol Pot ...”, page 137

<sup>89</sup> Philip Short, “Pol Pot ...”, page 138 (the author’s reference to the semi-official newspaper *Realities Cambodgiennes*, dated 17 August 1962. According to the newspaper, someone provided this document to Phnom Penh.)

<sup>90</sup> Philip Short, “Pol Pot ...”, page 139

<sup>91</sup> Philip Short, “Pol Pot ...”, page 139

### **E. Striving to learn from the Geneva Agreements and strengthen the stance of independence, mastery, and self-reliance**

When I spoke casually with mid- and lower-level cadres, I never heard them talk about the letters of the Vietnamese leadership at all. I never heard them talk about the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Soviet Party at all. I never heard them talk about the choice between peaceful and non-peaceful means. I just heard them talk about trying to study and learn from experience, primary from there Geneva Agreements. In these studies, they tried to emphasize for the cadres to see that in the end, at time of the Geneva Agreement and afterwards, Vietnam was not able help defend Kampuchea interests. So then, we could not rely upon the “international proletarianism” that the Vietnamese were always running their mouths about. The most important lesson for them was the post 1954 experience and the 1955 elections when they were chased down and surrounded and shot at like deer when they hid in the forests and never dared raise their heads near the villages. They took this experience as the experience of their lives so they could control their own destinies with their own hands and stop allowing any foreign country manage their affairs in their place. They had to take a stance on independence, mastery, and relying on their own forces and endure the life-and-death hardships and sorrows on their own. They had to maintain solidarity with the Vietnamese Party that was continuing to lead the struggle to unite Vietnam, but they were members of an independent Party and were no longer subordinate to the leadership of the Indochinese Communist Party.

The policy of building the Party in the countryside as well as in the cities was to build a resistance movement. The slogan in the cities was to struggle for the nation and democracy. In the countryside, the slogan was to struggle to modify the livelihood of the people and oppose the violations of every type.

They tried to agitate and train the peasantry to learn how to struggle to defend their economic interests and livelihood by themselves, from low to high, and to learn how to set up and organize their forces in the form of various associations of many forms: rice organizations, medicine organizations, kerosene organizations, to join together to purchase anything they needed and take it and sell it at little profit to counter the business middlemen ... and be in solidarity in the struggle against acts of land theft and violations of every kind by the power-holding classes. Any subdistrict chief, any deputy clerk, any forestry chief, any fishery ministry officer that was the most vicious, they would arrest and kill ... And they struggled to defend one another against campaigns of arrests and helped hide one another so that the power holders could not arrest them ... etc. They even organized “Covert Guards” that used only kerchiefs, cattle ties, knives, hatchets, and clubs as weapons to capture anyone who dared sneak into the villages to listen to the meetings of the peasants or the meetings of the cadres. (In early 1968, it was these “Covert Guards” that played the leading role in leading villagers to surround the barracks of Lon Nol soldiers and seize weapons without the soldiers knowing in advance.) All of these multi-type actions helped the peasants to see their strength more and more clearly and become more and more politically aware. Gradually, they learned how to discuss and resolve all the various issues in the villages by themselves, and the villages slipped from

the control of the village and subdistrict state authorities to become squares in a revolutionary net in the countryside that they kept on weaving like this every day. It was by this method that the peasants studied and learned about self-reliance, about “mastering one’s own destiny,” and about the profound meaning of the terms “independence and mastery.” In short, it was like this that they studied and learned from the experience of the Geneva Agreement.

Along with this, each time they met, there was an agenda item that was called the general situation. Through this agenda item they came to understand the situation throughout the country, the arrest campaigns in this or that province, the United States of America and SEATO pressure on Kampuchea, the developments of the war in Vietnam, Lon Nol preparations to carry out a coup, etc.

#### **F. 1963: The second important turning point**

Norodom Sihanouk’s strongest speech against the communists was during the 1958 elections. This subsided during 1959 because he was busy with the South Vietnamese Army intrusions deep inside Kampuchean territory and the Thai, South Vietnamese, and American conspiracy to create the Dap Chhuon treason troubles because of their displeasure at Sihanouk’s “leaning toward the communists.” And Sihanouk was angry because of the support of those three countries for Son Ngoc Thanh. This is what led Sihanouk to move closer to the block of socialist countries. Inside the country through 1960, the activities of “leftists”, including the Pracheachon Group, were pressured. However, this policy depended upon Sihanouk’s volatile satisfaction or dissatisfaction and his pushing the left to duel with the right and pushing the right to duel with the left. So then, forces closest to America kept strengthening and expanding; the campaigns against the left increased and decreased, but generally speaking, they increased.

So then, this is why on 10 January 1962, 14 members of the Pracheachon Group were arrested in Kampong Cham Province. The majority of those arrested were locals. They police said that they had said they were under the command of Norn Suon and were collecting political and military secrets in the area. So then, Norn Suon and all of them were accused of conspiracy against the State. Ben Kiernan understands that these accusations were contradictory.<sup>92</sup> He noted that in part, those accused were part of an intelligence network to gather information from military posts along the border, and in part as the semi-official newspaper *Realities Cambodgiennes* wrote, that “In actuality, before the elections (scheduled for June), the Pracheachon Group was trying to increase their poisonous propaganda to increase their chances and to please their foreign bosses.” On 21 January, an editorial in the Pracheachon Newspaper accused the Minister of National Security of “having carried out activities of all kinds to force the newspaper into difficulty.” Since this newspaper was having troubles with the police and because their articles had criticized the government, this editorial became another source of trouble that led to the arrest of Chou Chet and one of his colleagues and the shutting down of the newspaper. So then, the first and final effort of the communists to carry out legal activities ended. At the instructions of Sihanouk, the Military Court sentenced Norn Suon

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<sup>92</sup> Ben Kiernan, “How Pol Pot Came to Power,” page 195

and his colleagues to death. During the 1962 elections, the Pracheachon Group had no candidates and they ceased activity and disappeared after that, but “leftist” groups still existed in the Assembly. Hou Yuon, who spoke unforgivingly, and Huy Nim [sic], the Director of Customs, were re-elected. I myself was elected as a member of the Assembly for the first time, and also entered into the government.

In July, there was more trouble. The Secretary of the Communist Party, Tou Samuth, was captured and killed.<sup>93</sup> He was living in Tuol Svay Prey in southwestern Phnom Penh. That day, he left his house to buy medicine for his sick child, and the secret police were waiting for him. Word was that he was taken to one of Lon Nol’s houses to be tortured, but that he refused to talk, so he was killed; he was buried south of Steung Mean Chey.

No one can know who betrayed him. In truth, his death opened the door for Pol Pot’s rise to take the leadership of the Party. In truth, as has been described above, the influence of Pol Pot had been constantly rising in the upper echelons throughout the Party.

We all know that Tou Samuth had waited until the end of the 1955 elections were completed before he snuck back into Phnom Penh and began his activities as the person responsible for Phnom Penh. As for Saloth Sar, he had begun to show his political capabilities gradually while setting up forces to demand that Kampuchea follow a policy of neutrality and non-alignment during the 1955 elections. On this point, please read Ben Kiernan, as follows: “Even though previously he had not been a revolutionary leader, his education and Phnom Penh being like his home, Pol Pot had gradually gained political gravitas at a time when the previous leaders of the resistance movement (who all came from low-level families in the countryside) were feeling their way along a path they had never known before at all.”<sup>94</sup> From then on, Pol Pot always showed his analytical capability, and Ta [Tou Samuth] and Nuon Chea always accepted his analyses. This is why a little at a time, especially after the 1960 Congress, Pol Pot had already been playing the role of Party Secretary, though officially he was number three.

We still remember that since 1957 the three leaders were in agreement on the policy of creating a new Cambodian Party that would still be an ally of Vietnam but would no longer be under the command of Vietnam. Pol Pot played an important role in preparing the political program and the Statutes. Therefore, they did not see Pol Pot as having had any having any interest in the killing of Tou Samuth. Furthermore, in his 1976 confessions, Vorn Vet wrote, “When they captured Ta Tou ... the Brothers (the Party leaders) stopped going outside and stopped working covertly.”<sup>95</sup> Vorn Vet’s use of the term “Grandfather Tou” meant that they had all respected him all along. Regardless, after 1979, the Vietnamese still said that Tou Samuth had been killed in a Pol Pot conspiracy. In late February 1963, the Second Congress convened a meeting to rubber

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<sup>93</sup> Philip Short, “Pol Pot ...”, page 1141; Ben Kiernan, “How Pol Pot Came to Power,” page 197

<sup>94</sup> Ben Kiernan, “How Pol Pot Came to Power,” page 157

<sup>95</sup> David Chandler, “Brother Number One,” page 61



stamp Saloth Sar as Party Secretary.<sup>96</sup> Nuon Chea was still number two. Ieng Sary and Sao Phim became full-rights members of the Standing Committee. Four additional members of the Central Committee were selected: Mok, the deputy of Ta Màng in the Southwest; Ros Nhim, Secretary of the Northwest Zone; Vorn Vet, of the Phnom Penh Committee; and finally, Son Sen.

This was a one-day meeting attended by 17 or 18 persons, but the Congress had re-arranged the leadership apparatus in a timely way.

For those in the West, early 1960 was a year of peace and happiness in Kampuchea. But the waves began to pound hard. The state authority's violations of the law, sometimes with the collusion of Sihanouk, became more and more unacceptable.

“For increasing numbers of Cambodian youth, Sihanouk was not the person to resolve the country's problems: he was a person who created problems. He was a symbol of an outdated regime where positions in the State were items to be bought and sold. His was a feudal regime in modern form but with no real meaning.” These words of Philip Short lay out the thoughts of the youth of that time.<sup>97</sup> The student wanted a suitable government that thought of social justice: they wanted a change. In Siemreap a minor student complaint against the police who were always making trouble for them became a rebellion when they learned that a student had died in detention at a police post.<sup>98</sup> In revenge, the students swarmed around, attacked, and killed two police commanders. The police post was smashed by the students; the office furniture was tossed outside and burned. For three days, 24-26 February, Siemreap fell into the hands of the students. Their placards read “The society is corrupt” and “The society is unjust.” The Minister of Education sought to negotiate with the students, but he and the officials that accompanied him were grabbed by the students and paraded along the road for bystanders to jeer at. Similar demonstrations occurred in Phnom Penh and Kampong Cham.<sup>99</sup>

Norodom Sihanouk was at that time visiting China. When he received news of all those demonstrations, he was startled and he sent a telegram instructing investigations. Lon Nol understood these instructions as authorization to go on a suppression campaign against those who were perceived as being communists. When Sihanouk returned in early March, he scolded the Prime Minister, Norodom Kantol, saying he was “incapable,” and he demanded that the government resign, announced the dissolution of the Sangkum and the Assembly, and called new elections. On 4 March, when political tensions reached a peak, Sihanouk broadcast a list of 34 persons that had been prepared by Lon Nol and accused all 34 of being “cowards, liars, wreckers, saboteurs, and traitors” and called for them to form a new government to show the people the extent of their capabilities (But

<sup>96</sup> Philip Short, “Pol Pot ...” page 141

<sup>97</sup> Philip Short, “Pol Pot ...” page 135

<sup>98</sup> Philip Short, “Pol Pot ...” page 142-143; David Chandler, “Brother Number One,” Pages 63-64, Ben Kiernan, “How Pol Pot Came to Power,” pages 199-202

<sup>99</sup> David Chandler, “Brother Number One,” Page 63; Philip Short, “Pol Pot ...” page 143,

Sihanouk reserved for himself the right to appoint the Ministers of Police, Interior, and National Defense.)

On 7 March, he called the entire group to meet at the Office of the Prime Minister and had each one respond in writing as to whether or not they agreed to form a new government. They all wrote that only Sihanouk was capable of leading the country.

However, among those 34 persons were two that did not appear: Chou Chet, who had just been freed from prison three weeks earlier and who had already fled to the forests, and Saloth Sar, who had gone into hiding on the day the list was first broadcast.<sup>100</sup> The typhoon quieted by mid March. Sihanouk's shouts scolding the Assembly, the government, and the society were quietly forgotten. But in Sihanouk's explosion of anger there seemed to be something he had thought about meticulously: after staying three weeks in China, by avoiding praising a communist country, he intended to warn that Kampuchea was his.

In the Standing Committee of the Communist Party of Kampuchea, Saloth Sar announced that all three of the members of the Standing Committee that had been named in the list had to leave Phnom Penh.<sup>101</sup> Furthermore, this idea had already been germinating since 1960. Ieng Sary later told Philip Short that he had opposed this idea. He understood that before leaving Phnom Penh, the Party first had to have its own base areas in the countryside and have to have a solid network in the city. However, Nuon Chea, who was not named in the list of 34 and therefore had not yet been exposed, said he took no action and he emphasized that the leaders whose names had been exposed need not stay any longer. Otherwise, this would have an impact on the others. So then, Ieng Sary reluctantly agreed. This was the second major turning point of the movement.

### **G. 1963: Falling hostage to the Vietnamese, but continuing to move slowly toward independence**

A South Vietnamese communist guide led Saloth Sar to a Vietnamese base area at Châmbàk near Thnaot Village in Tây Ninh Province. The base area of the South Vietnamese National Liberation Front was nearby. Up until that time, Saloth Sar did not know that their base area was so close to Kampuchea. Daylight never penetrated the dense forest there. After staying there a short while, their faces turned a wax-like pale.

During the first week there were three of them: Saloth Sar, Ieng Sary, and Son Sen. Like at Krabao nine years earlier, they were forbidden from coming and going and were not permitted to contact nearby Cambodian villages. Aircraft had already bombed along the border, and if this base area was exposed, not only the Cambodian base would be impacted, but even more seriously the location of the South Vietnamese National Liberation Front would also be attacked. However, Sar and his colleagues were not ignorant students like they had been before; they were the leaders of a national Party, and

<sup>100</sup> Philip Short, "Pol Pot ..." page 143

<sup>101</sup> Philip Short, "Pol Pot ..." page 144

at least in theory they were equal to the Vietnamese. At Thnoat, all three seemed like separate people. They had the right to listen to the radio, and once a week “the Viet Cong, their hosts, came to meet them to inform them about the situation.”<sup>102</sup>

But since the suppression campaigns in Phnom Penh were growing increasingly strong, they gained more and more colleagues. Keo Meas and his family who had been hiding in the North arrived at mid year. A courier office was organized at a Cambodian village a four-hour walk away. So then, Sar could communicate back and forth by letter to Cambodia without Vietnamese knowledge. Around the end of the year, there were six or seven of them. Life there was not normal: it was like living in a pressure-cooker. The slightest thing would explode into arguments. In particular, Keo Meas complained that the group from Paris kept to themselves to prepare something without letting the others know. In truth, no one knew what had to be done.

By early 1964, Saloth Sar persuaded the Viet Cong to let the Cambodians set up their own location in order to avoid political complications and so that the Cambodians might prepare their revolution in steps by themselves. It was this base area that they called Office 100. Office 100 was on Vietnamese territory under strict Viet Cong control. Nei Saran, who arrived from Phnom Penh in August and who had become the administrative controller of the base area saw that “At this base, everything depends completely upon the Vietnamese, from food and various supplies to security, everything ... To walk from one office to another, we must have a Vietnamese guard accompany us, and we must respect and obey them.”

But Nei Saran recognized in political and ideological terms “A little at a time, ... we made progress in terms of the stance of independence.” In truth, since October there had been a broad meeting of the Central Committee in the middle of the forest on Cambodian territory near the border. That was the first meeting that the Cambodians had held. This meeting was held over the course of many weeks. A Party document discovered in 1978 claimed that “The 1964 meeting ... strove to find a way to counter secret American preparation for acts of treason.”<sup>103</sup> In 1980, a member of the Party told Steve Heder approximately the same thing. In these secret preparations, the United States supported Lon Nol or Son Ngoc Thanh against Sihanouk. In such an eventuality the Khmer Rouge saw that they could not rely upon a Sihanouk alliance with China or Vietnam. They had to figure out and prepare a combined armed-political struggle. They underlined the life-and-death importance of “self-reliance.”

Why had Pol Pot and less than ten of his colleagues, isolated from the country in a forest where the light of day could not penetrate, the hostages of the Vietnamese who since 1955 had sought ways to “force them to be quiet and live an extremely strange life, like they were living in a pressure-cooker,” know that the Americans were secretly preparing acts of treason with the support of Lon Nol or Son Ngoc Thanh against

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<sup>102</sup> Philip Short, “Pol Pot ...” page 146

<sup>103</sup> David Chandler, “Brother Number One,” page 68; Philip Short, “Pol Pot ...” page 146

Sihanouk? Because all of them, especially Saloth Sar, had one principle: no event, large or small, was to be put aside; everything had to be assembled for analysis. The list of 34 was analyzed. Their having to leave Phnom Penh in 1963 was analyzed. The number of people who had come to the forest that had increased from three to six or seven was analyzed. These analyses showed that Lon Nol had increased his campaign of suppression inside the country, so the forces close to the Americans had grown fat, and someday they would encircle Sihanouk. The Khmer Rouge leaders, in particular Saloth Sar, implemented this principle in all issues: internal issues were analyzed according to this principle; each important cadre was monitored and analyzed according to this principle. Decisions made during meetings were hand-written on stencils that were wrapped around bottle they used as a roneo, and they used ink made by burning old rubber tire sandals and imprinted on paper. The texts were sent throughout the country. Nikân, the younger brother of Son Sen, remembers that couriers hid the texts inside sticky rice pastries or in bottles of fish paste or they rolled the texts up small and stuffed them into segments of bamboo to prevent the police from seeing them.

Ben Kiernan wrote “Before the end of 1964, when Lon Nol and the secret police were sending out their forces to chase and arrest revolutionaries in the countryside, the decision that was called “the words of Pol Pot” reached revolutionaries in time to explain that they should flee to the forests to prepare for combined armed-political struggle. Related to this matter, Ben Kiernan gives examples. The first example is the case of Sao Phim, where the “the words of Pol Pot” arrived in time. The second example was the case of Kè Vĩn, where the “word” did not reach the subject. In the case of Sao Phim, “He seemed to disappear from the village in late 1964 without anyone having come to find and arrest him or mistreat him. He went to a site near a small stream at Samraong in Daun Tei Subdistrict southeast of Kampong Cham. From there, if anything happened, he could flee into the zone of the Southern National Liberation Front adjacent to Tây Ninh Province.” In the other example, the signal to flee did not reach Kè Vĩn. After he go out of prison in 1957, he set up residence in his home village at Baray in Kampong Thom Province and had six children. One source revealed that he made a living by selling alcohol and chickens and that he also did political work. Suddenly in 1964, the police were looking to arrest him, and this led him to flee into the forests and leave behind his wife and children without any advance preparation. These events led him to hold a serious grudge against the administration of Norodom Sihanouk and anyone else directly or indirectly connected with his being separated from his family like that. Ben Kiernan writes that Kè Pok was the new name of Kè Vĩn: he changed his name in memory of the location and time that he first fled to the forest. Kè Pok’s comparing his situation of fleeing with the situation of Sao Phim who had gotten advance word and had left his home village in a more orderly manner also led him to hold a competitive grudge against Sao Phim. This competition continued until 1968 [sic] when Sao Phim killed himself.

The author gives other examples regarding “the words of Pol Pot” (that is, the decisions of the broad Central Committee meetings) to revolutionaries aright at the time when the police were looking to arrest him, Koy Thuon, Phuong, Chhouk, and Moul

Sambat (Ros Nhim), the military commander United Issarak Front in the Northwest Zone.<sup>104</sup>

In January 1965, the Central Committee met again to further examine the previous decisions. The decisions that were modified in this second meeting attacked the idea of Khrushchev regarding peaceful transition “to socialism” and made clear the role of “revolutionary violence to oppose the imperialists and their servants.”<sup>105</sup> Issues that might lead to contradictions with Vietnam such as the issue of Sihanouk and the decision of the Central Committee to stop accepting Vietnamese advice either used extremely cautious phrasing or were not stated in the text at all.

#### **H. 1965: The first clashes with the Vietnamese leadership**

In January 1965, that meeting of the Central Committee decided to have Saloth Sar lead a Cambodian delegation to Hanoi. Up until then, the Cambodian communists contacted the Southern Office of the Vietnamese Workers’ Party. Now the aim was to prepare full Party-to-Party contact and to seek an accommodation on the strategic direction of the Cambodian Party illuminated by the constant escalation of the war in South Vietnam.

They had to wait until early April for the response of approval from Hanoi to arrive. Saloth Sar departed on the journey through northeastern Kampuchea along with Keo Meas, and they followed the Ho Chi Minh Trail which at the time was nothing more than a track of transportation personnel across the mountains of Laos headed straight for the mountain range the Vietnamese called the Truong Son. The journey required two and a half months.

Upon arrival, Saloth Sar met Ho Chi Minh, whom he met two additional times during this trip. Lê Duân, the General Secretary of the Vietnamese Workers’ Party had previously met with the Cambodian communists when he was responsible for the Southern Office during the 1940s and 1950s. During his five-month visit, Sar and Lê Duân met twelve times. Afterwards, when Sar thought of those meetings, he said, “They were not very happy ones.”<sup>106</sup> Sar said, “Outwardly, the Vietnamese said they recognized the independence of the Cambodian Party, but in their bones, they did not accept us as equals ... We had very different views. We did not reach a common view with one another.”

Hanoi did not want to see another rebellion in Kampuchea. The thoughts of the entire Vietnamese leadership were concentrated only on the entry of American infantry into South Vietnam. They did not want to see any more trouble elsewhere. The decision

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<sup>104</sup> Ben Kiernan, “How Pol Pot Came to Power,” pages 212-215

<sup>105</sup> Philip Short, “Pol Pot ...” page 156

<sup>106</sup> Philip Short, “Pol Pot ...” page 156 (the author’s reference to an interview of Pol Pot by Chinese journalist Kai Simi in 1984)

of Norodom Sihanouk to break diplomatic relations with the United States meant that like it or not, the Prince was an ally of Vietnam, and more importantly, in approximately March or April, Sihanouk had just agreed to let the South Vietnamese National Liberation Front set up permanent shelters on Cambodian territory along the border. Previously he had just winked each time the Viet Cong entered Cambodian territory. Also, negotiations were in progress on an agreement to transport weapons by ship from China to the South Vietnamese National Liberation Front through the Port of Sihanoukville for transport onward on the backs of bearers along the difficult Ho Chi Minh trail.

Lê Duân tried with all his ability to explain to the Cambodians that political struggle was very valuable and was “organizational and military preparation for armed struggle” and he tried to promise the Cambodians that “If the Americans expand the war, we will move forward to armed struggle based on that.” Lê Duân did take account at all of the suppression inside Cambodia. All the lessons that the Vietnamese had taught the Cambodians reappeared: the Cambodian struggle was inseparable from the struggle of the Vietnamese and the Lao; Vietnam had had to wait for the victory of the revolution in China before it could be victorious over the French, so the Cambodians had to wait a while for the victory of the Vietnamese before their own revolution could be victorious. After Vietnam gained its freedom, freedom would automatically arrive in Kampuchea. That the Cambodian party emphasized “autonomy was a bit unreasonable.” The reasoning of Lê Duân was that the most important conflict in the world was the conflict between socialism and capitalism, not, as the Cambodians said, the conflict between the exploited people and the imperialists, and in this situation, the important thing was international solidarity.

To Sar, since 1955 when they gave instructions to the Cambodian party after the Geneva Agreement, the plucky of the Vietnamese leadership had not changed at all. They maintained the right to give instructions to the Cambodians; however, the Cambodians did not have the right to say anything. This appeared in the form of the wording that seemed to be a final order of Lê Duân forbidding “At least for now, do not impact Sihanouk at all.”<sup>107</sup>

And since Lê Duân wanted Sar to see the sacrifices the Vietnamese had made to help the struggle of the Cambodians, Lê Duân proposed that Sar look at the documentation that the Vietnamese maintained in their files. Sar spent many days reading that documentation in detail and drew the conclusion that:

“I saw that since 1930 ... through 1965, all the documentation of the Vietnamese Communist Party spoke of the Kampuchean and Lao People’s Revolutionary Parties as if they were branches of the Vietnamese Party ... ” Before I personally saw all those documents, I had faith in Vietnam. However, after I read those documents, I ceased to have faith in them. I saw that they had organized a party organization inside our country

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<sup>107</sup> Philip Short, “Pol Pot ...” page 157 (the author’s reference to an interview of Saloth Sar by Chinese journalist Cai Ximei in May 1984)

in order to their single strategic goal, that is, the Indochina Federation. They had created a single party to represent one combined territory.”<sup>108</sup>

In truth, the 1965 visit was a turning point. Up until this time, it is true that even though the Cambodians were very tired of the Vietnamese who had set themselves up as the fathers of the Cambodians, they had not the least doubts about the common goal of both parties. After the discussions in Hanoi, Sar reached the conclusion that the interests of the Vietnamese were not the same as the interests of the Cambodians. This is not to say that they were contrary to one another, however in the short term this had not yet appeared overtly, and both sides still maintained a state of seemingly being life-and-death friends.<sup>109</sup>

While Sar was staying in Vietnam, he told his hosts that they wanted to go to China. It was many months before Beijing’s response arrived. Sar stayed in Beijing, China for one month. Sar encountered an exciting atmosphere after the difficulties that had occurred in Hanoi. Mao’s Little Red Book was just recently been reprinted, and in particular the speech of major significance of Chinese Minister of Defense Lin Biao entitled “Cheers! The Victory of People’s War” provided support to almost every point of the stance of the Cambodian party.

Deep inside, the Chinese were not much different from the Vietnamese, meaning they were worried about the occurrence of armed struggle in Kampuchea, and their reasons were similar. Cooperation with Sihanouk was of life-and-death importance to continuing the struggle in the South. However, they were different from the Vietnamese: Beijing respected the independence of brother and sister parties. China was seeking out new allies in their disputes with the Soviet Union, and even though they had a fraternal relationship with Vietnam, the appearance of an independent Cambodian party with an ideology similar to theirs in the end had to be balanced with the loss of Indochina under the command of Vietnam. As for Saloth Sar, his one month stay in China was a stage of beginning a new alliance, and perhaps strongly raised his morale.

### **I. Late 1966: Another major turning point, moving toward complete independence from Vietnam.**

After returning to Office 100, Saloth Sar called a meeting to set the strategy and tactics of the Party for the following year.<sup>110</sup> The meeting was frequently interrupted by “enemy aircraft, probably American aircraft patrolling the border. The escalation of the Vietnam War, the events in Indonesia, and the developing situation in Kampuchea were important agenda items, along with the news of the massacres in Indonesia between October 1965 and March 1966 and the earthshaking event of the arrest of President Sukarno and the killings or imprisonment of members and sympathizers of the Indonesian Communist Party. The liquidation of the Indonesian Communist Party

<sup>108</sup> Philip Short, “Pol Pot ...” page 157 (the author’s reference to an interview of Saloth Sar by Chinese journalist Cai Ximei)

<sup>109</sup> Philip Short, “Pol Pot ...” page 159

<sup>110</sup> Philip Short, “Pol Pot ...” page 158

seriously worried Saloth Sar. If an army that was “close to Lon Nol’s Americans” achieved something similar to what had happened in Indonesia, Norodom Sihanouk would be unable to protect anyone. However, the Vietnamese still insisted that the Cambodians continue their alliance with Sihanouk. Therefore, it was as if the Vietnamese were ordering the Cambodians to make a journey toward their own suicide. As for the Vietnamese, they would not be able to rescue the Cambodians. The meeting went on for two weeks.<sup>111</sup> The meeting made three decisions:

**First**, to change the name of the Party from the Workers’ Party to the CPK. As I see it, only Saloth Sar clearly knew the reasons behind this name change. It was an announcement of independence from Vietnam, but the name change was still kept secret. The other members of the Party did not know about it; nor did the Vietnamese.

**Second**, the Party decided to leave Office 100 for an isolated location in Ratanakiri Province. The reason given to the Vietnamese was that the war in Vietnam forced its relocation to a safer place. In fact, it was to escape far away from Vietnamese control. At Ratanakiri, the Cambodians had their own base area far from the eyes and nose of the Vietnamese, different from Office 100 in that it was inside Kampuchean territory.

**Third**, the most important decision of all, was that each Zone was to make ready to join in armed struggle.

However, these decisions were still written-up in the most cautious terms. For one thing, the Cambodians did not yet dare do anything to make the Vietnamese angry. Furthermore, internally, the Cambodians were not yet in complete agreement. The decisions instructed efforts to strengthen and expand Party secrecy in the city and more active combat in terms of politics and “the use of political violence.” When circumstance permitted, it was imperative to use “arms.” In making all of these decisions, there was not yet anything that the Vietnamese saw as unacceptable. However, if they read between the lines, these decisions showed a pattern of initiating civil war, meaning that they were a rejection of all the reasoning of Lê Duân had raised when he asked that the Cambodians not do anything that the Vietnamese had not agreed to in advance.

Internally, shortly afterwards Vorn Vet and Sao Phim had concerns about the strategy of armed struggle. Vorn Vet wrote, “My stance was that I opposed armed struggle in the countryside. First, this was my personal stance: I understood that it was not possible ... in mid 1966, Brother Phim came from his base area to Sè’s house. He was a messenger at the time ... Brother Phim wanted to visit Siemreap to see Angkor, and he returned through Battambang. I accompanied him ... Brother Phim raised the issue of armed struggle with me. He said that we had to oppose it. The people did not want bloodshed ... in the base areas in the East there would be real difficulties if there was armed struggle ... I (Vorn Vet) responded that that it was totally useless ... With us being

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<sup>111</sup> Philip Short, “Pol Pot ...” page 158



barehanded like this, the enemy will smash us first and we will not be able to rise up again.”<sup>112</sup>

However, all those concerns abated quickly.<sup>113</sup> The government’s suppression campaigns against the leftists that increased in 1964 had reached a level that “In general, in military and security terms, they decided to do everything independently and at times with the secret agreement of Sihanouk. This meant that from then on, according to every source, “merciless” suppression became the norm.”<sup>114</sup>

Around late 1966, everything that the Central Committee had said in October 1964, in particular, about the conspiracy of the Americans to support Lon Nol ... against Sihanouk “appeared even more clearly. The decisions at the time that we must not rely upon the alliances with Sihanouk and Vietnam, that there was a life-and-death necessity to rely upon our own forces in combined armed-political struggle ... all that was confirmed as being correct.”

Almost all observers saw that the new Assembly that appeared after the elections on 11 October was a “right-wing” Assembly with nothing but feudalist officials and businessmen. Perhaps Sihanouk wanted to avoid bringing to life a government with which he was clearly dissatisfied, and he did not point to the Prime Minister and members of his government as he had done previously. Sihanouk asked that the Assembly select them on their own. On 18 October, as everyone had predicted, the Assembly appointed Lon Nol Prime Minister, and one week later Lon Nol appointed a rightist government. This was the first time that the government was not appointed by the Head of State. The French ambassador sent a message to Paris saying, “There is just one issue upon which the members of the government agree: none of them are loyal to Sihanouk.”<sup>115</sup>

To Sihanouk, the appearance of a government that was independent from him like was an issue that he should have easily been able to resolve. He tried with difficulty to limit the power of the new Prime Minister, but he seemed to lose confidence in himself and turned to making films instead. From then on, his films, like his policies, were not very successful. In truth, from that time on, he was surrounded by the forces of the right.

Beginning in January 1967, Sihanouk left Cambodian for France for two months for treatment his overweight. Ben Kiernan wrote the following: “It seems clear that with the agreement of Sihanouk, Lon Nol seemed to select this time to increase the suppression, probably with the goal of bogging-down in the mud the plans of armed struggle of the Communist Party.”<sup>116</sup> Along with this, the opportunity seemed to be right in his face. The previous year, 40 percent of the rice harvested throughout the country

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<sup>112</sup> Ben Kiernan, “How Pol Pot Came to Power” page 230 (the author’s reference to the 1978 confessions of Vom Vet)

<sup>113</sup> Ben Kiernan, “How Pol Pot Came to Power” page 230

<sup>114</sup> Ben Kiernan, “How Pol Pot Came to Power” pages 230-231 (the author’s emphasis)

<sup>115</sup> Philip Short, “Pol Pot ...” pages 162-163

<sup>116</sup> Ben Kiernan, “How Pol Pot Came to Power” page 251

had been smuggled out to serve the Viet Cong, causing a loss of approximately two-thirds of the income of the State. The problem was that the Vietnamese communists dared to pay a higher price than the Cambodian State paid. So then, in order to gather up the rice and send it to the State at a price set by the State, force was required. So then, Sihanouk agreed with the plan of the new Prime Minister to send military-accompanied “Action Groups” to the countryside.

To Sar and his colleagues there was nothing surprising in the results of the elections or Lon Nol’s rise to Prime Minister in a government that was not fearful or hesitant toward Sihanouk. This was a stage of “preparation for betrayal” that they had long seen and which they and the Central Committee had strived to find a way to counter since 1964. All these issues, whether or not Sihanouk knew it or not, in a large part arose because of him. For more than a decade, in his position of Minister of Defense, Lon Nol was responsible for the task of suppressing and opposing communism. Also for more than decade, the tightening of the bonds of friendship with socialist countries outside the country went forward with Sihanouk relying on his stronger and stronger right hand to suppress the left forces inside the country more and more strongly. The issue of the 34 persons that Lon Nol set up in 1963 after Sihanouk had sung the praises of communist China for more than a week, was just one strange thing among many that were seen. What could not be seen was even greater. After a long while, the country’s foreign policy of contacts with socialist countries in combination with a domestic policy that relied upon rightists to suppress leftist forces like this would make the rightists forces that were close to America prosper and grow more and more until someday they would inescapably surround Sihanouk. As for Sihanouk’s power, it was being worn down more and more. As an example, around early 1966 the rightist forces had the strength to dare to both directly and indirectly criticize Sihanouk’s disguised efforts to display his dictatorship as a democracy instead, and they criticized the royal family’s corruption ... This is what led him to stop recruiting candidates for the Sangkum Reastr Niyum to stand for election in 1966. This is what allowed Lon Nol to set up and put in place their candidates instead. At the time, some diplomats wrote that the political atmosphere seemed cloudy.<sup>117</sup>

The situation having reached this state, it was very difficult to turn back. The rightists could do as they pleased independently from Sihanouk, and sometimes they were able to create the various preconditions to have Sihanouk agree with them as well. Lê Duân, based on his being a large party, refused to listen at all to Saloth Sar’s explanations of the situation. So then, the Cambodian party could not follow the path that the Vietnamese big player so stubbornly pointed out for them. This is because if they had stuck to that path, they would have been moving toward suicide. As already described, the Cambodian party made another step along a separate path, meaning they instructed the each of the Zones to prepare for “armed struggle.”

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<sup>117</sup> Philip Short, “Pol Pot ...” page 163

## **J. Returning to assessing the root of the peasant rebellion at Samlaut**

It is true that the State's buying rice at a below-market price was one factor that made the general political atmosphere tense, but it was not the root of the popular peasant rebellion at Samlaut like various researchers have assumed. This is because the peasants in Kampuchea did not sell the rice themselves: they used it as collateral in high interest rate loans; it was the middlemen who controlled the rice market.

The root of the peasant rebellion in Samlaut was Lon Nol suppression. Shortly afterwards, Sihanouk spoke about Lon Nol's program as follows: "Gathering up the rice was done at a cheap price. Thus, the middle-men were completely eliminated." The notable thing with this program is Sihanouk's attaching this program with leftist opposition. "Their program (of sabotage) and destruction encountered difficulties when Lon Nol's colleagues created Action Committees to gather up the rice in the districts, subdistricts, and villages. The Action Committees that represented the patriotic society and made it hard for the branches of the Pracheachon Group to exist. Up until now, no one at all had bothered them, and they had carried out their activities without anyone denouncing them."<sup>118</sup>

In truth, by January and February when the rice collection program began, all the rice had been harvested and had mostly fallen into the hands of the loan-makers. This meant that if Lon Nol had really wanted to collect the rice, he would have not needed to organize the "Action Committees" in the districts, subdistricts, and villages. He need only to turn to look at the provinces and the major population centers instead."

In truth, I had heard people talk about "Action Committees" for very many years." Lon Nol organized these committees in the countryside throughout the country without Sihanouk's knowledge. They were tools to both suppress the communists and to serve his personal political ambitions. As an example, the results of the 1966 elections to a large part were the results of the activities of these "Committees."

During the 1950s, Samlaut was a solid base area in the guerilla war against the French. So then, for a long time after Geneva, the people there had been mistreated and violated in every way. Now, in addition to the previous mistreatment, there were new troubles, forcible drafts, "voluntary" payments for new government schemes, and land was confiscated from the people and given to military commanders and was used to create a peasant camp of the "Sangkum Reastr Niyum Youth." Furthermore, the people were unhappy with their land being confiscated and becoming camps for the Khmer Rouge, whose attitudes at that time were not so very different from that of the soldiers ...

Furthermore, the peasants at that location had long hated Lon Nol, because he had once been governor of Battambang during the war in 1950. Also, those Action Committees and those soldiers who were in conflict with the peasants at that location were appointed as military commanders or sent in from Phnom Penh. It was only normal

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<sup>118</sup> Ben Kiernan, "How Pol Pot Came to Power" page 252 (The author cites Sihanouk's speech in Phnom Penh during March 1976.)

that the anger of the pageants there toward those “Action Committees” or those soldiers made them angry with Phnom Penh. The communists in that area were peasants too and had feelings for the peasants and were unhappy about the mistreatment and violations against the peasants. To them and to the peasants there, those soldiers were “Sihanouk’s soldiers.”

So then, the situation rapidly worsened. On the morning of 2 April, a group of villagers at Samlaut attacked the soldiers, killing two and seizing two weapons. Two hundred other peasants headed toward the agricultural camp of the Sangkum Reas Niyum Youth at Kranhoung that the peasants saw as a symbol of the mistreatment and violation they had suffered at the hand of the State authorities, and they completely burned the camp down. As dusk, military posts at two other villagers were attacked and smashed, and one subdistrict official was killed. The acts of rebellion committed during a period of four days included two burned bridges and another official killed. Then paratroopers arrived “to re-pacify” the location. In late April, 200 peasants were arrested. They were beaten and interrogated, and their houses were burned to the ground.<sup>119</sup> Sihanouk went to look at the location and passed out presents, food and clothing, and pardoned everyone; but as for the peasants, what meaning did Sihanouk’s generosity have? They found it difficult to understand who had sent in all those paratroopers. Was it Sihanouk? Was it Lon Nol? Or was it both of them? Regardless, both of them had joined together in one State. Thus, the attacks of the military posts continued, and the villagers of three other villages fled their homes and like the others had done. Communist cadre, some of whom were armed, accompanied approximately 500 peasants and withdrew to Phnom Veay Chap, an area covered with thick forests approximately 30 kilometers northeast of Samlaut. But the army had poisoned all the water sources and seized or destroyed the rice the peasants had stored, and in mid April their situation became really difficult.

At that time, Nuon Chea took a letter of instruction from the Standing Committee of the Communist Party of Kampuchea to Ros Nhim and Kuong Sophâl, revolutionary name Koe, instructing them to “stop making war, and start negotiating with the enemy.” Later, negotiations began with the newly-appointed Battambang Governor ĩn Tam through the abbot of a pagoda near the mountain. The governor promised not to take revenge, and the following month, on 18 June, Sihanouk announced that the rebellion had ended.<sup>120</sup>

But on this point all researchers agree that the promise not to take revenge was not respected. As an example, Ben Kiernan included an excerpt from Charles Meyer who wrote, “It was at that same time that the army and the provincial militia chose to conduct punishment operations! Villages were surrounded. People were strafed. Houses were burned ...”<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Philip Short, “Pol Pot ...” page 167

<sup>120</sup> Philip Short, “Pol Pot ...” page 167

<sup>121</sup> Philip Short, “Pol Pot ...” page 167

Donald Lancaster, an Englishman working in Sihanouk's office, wrote: "The military operations to punish the people killed hundreds of peasants and caused the peasants of Samlaut and surrounding areas to hate the regime forever." Locations suspected of being communist bases in the forest were bombed from the air; villages were strafed and burned to the ground ... The suppression in the area of the rebellion was widespread, because the soldiers were promised monetary payments for their (the rebels') heads, so that they could be hung on display at military headquarters."

The events at Samlaut, recalled ever since, caused many problems for both the Communist Party and for Norodom Sihanouk.

For the Communist Party of Kampuchea the peasant rebellion at Samlaut made it clear that the situation of contradiction within the society was ripe enough to begin implementing "a non-peaceful policy of struggle" that had been on the agenda since 1964. However, the Party had not at all readied itself to lead a rebel movement on a nationwide level. It is clear that if at that time they had not sought a negotiated resolution, the rebellion at Samlaut would have been mercilessly smashed.

As for Norodom Sihanouk, he was upset at heart. That the Cambodian peasants that he called his children and grandchildren would rise in rebellion against him -- Samdech Au -- was politically unforgivable.

He understood that this rebellion was the result of the work of the Viet Minh that had been left behind in place in the bases areas after 1954 who had been quietly lying in wait for a favorable time and opportunity. Their back-stage bosses were none other than the three left-wing Sangkum MPs: Khieu Samphan, Hou Yuon, and Hou Nim. They were the ones who were deliberately stirring up trouble to destabilize Lon Nol's right-wing government.<sup>122</sup> Whether Sihanouk actually believed this or not is another matter; however, this is what he said, and he stuck to it.

On 22 April, Sihanouk announcement by radio that these three members of the Assembly might be sent to the Military Court. This was not a threat to be taken lightly.<sup>123</sup>

Before we continue, it is my understanding that it is useful to examine and study the events at Samlaut.

First, it should be emphasized that in late 1966 and early 1967, the events at Samlaut were not isolated events.

As an example, on the other side of the country in Kraek District, Kampong Cham Province, in the village of birth of Sao Phim, Bos Village, was subjected to vicious suppression. Ben Kiernan has published an excerpt of his interview with a former East Zone cadre that seems to reflect the situation at that time:

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<sup>122</sup> Philip Short, "Pol Pot ..." page 167

<sup>123</sup> Philip Short, "Pol Pot ..." page 167

According to a villager who was in the forests with Sao Phim, “They came looking for us ... When Sihanouk’s soldiers arrived, they killed 26 revolutionaries in the village.” Another source stated that the victims were beheaded and their livers were gouged out by the soldiers. A third cadre in the East Zone who was also born at Bos Village continued, “So then, this is why (the revolutionary leadership) convened a meeting and decided to take up arms against the enemy in February 1967. Previously, we were politically active; but we had no weapons. Now we seized weapons and combined armed-political struggle began. We created armed propaganda teams that attacked only locations where the enemy was thin and small outpost, and we ambushed them on distant roads. We smashed any enemy agents that were active in some villages in Kandaol Chrum.”<sup>124</sup>

Ben Kiernan informs us that thought the country at that time, in later April, they reported that “2,000 Khmer Viet Minh were captured.”<sup>125</sup> First, the term “Khmer Viet Minh” in late 1966 and early 1967 was laughable. Second, this number in itself tells us the scale of the suppression throughout the country at that time.

Then we tested the situation of the people rebelling and objecting at Samlaut, to find out: What was that? And the people at Bos whom the soldiers or police arrested and killed and had their livers cut-out and their bile taken, what was that? It is very clear that the events at Samlaut when the people and peasants rebelled was a societal issue. The situation at Bos was a violation of the 1954 Geneva Agreement that ended the war in Indochina and permitted the resistance fighters to return to their homes. And whatever offenses they may have committed, their livers should not have been cut out nor their bile taken. Another question that has to be asked is: For the people in Samlaut or in Bos Village or other villages, what was the meaning of the independence of the country to them personally? It had no meaning whatsoever, or almost none. It was as if they were still under French colonialism: they had to bear the burden or the expense of “progress” in Phnom Penh or in various other provinces throughout the country: it was as if they were still under French colonialism. They were under the pressure in interest and loans. In this sense, nothing at all had changed except that at that time they owed money to Chinese middle men who collected their rice. Previously they owed money to Cambodian officials, Sihanouk’s officials. Under French colonialism, they knew Lon Nol’s face as someone who had already persecuted them in the past. Now Lon Nol returned once again to violate and persecute them just like before. Their livelihood had not only not changed, but even more suffering was added to what they already experienced. The arrival of the soldiers of the “Action Committees” during February and March 1967, was just one more drop of water that made the basin overflow. The events with the students in Siemreap that exploded into demonstrations in 1963 and quickly transformed into a rebellion were approximately the same. From then on the water overflowed the glass. However, the people responsible for the country took the situation lightly and did not examine it closely.

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<sup>124</sup> Ben Kiernan, “How Pol Pot Came to Power” page 253

<sup>125</sup> Ben Kiernan, “How Pol Pot Came to Power” page 255

Facing the societal situation, they responded with campaigns of arrests. This type of policy was certain to lead to rebellion. So then, there is no need to raise questions like some authors have raised, like when they ask, “Were the government campaigns of suppression the cause of or the direct result of the first signs of civil war?” And there is no need to endlessly ask the events like the uprising of the resistance in 1968, for example. All these events could not have been the acts of one person or one small group of persons; there is no need to find a scapegoat. I understand that this is Lesson Number One, and there is no need to further emphasize its importance.

Lesson Number Two is the case of the intellectuals like me and Hou Yuon and the others. It clarifies the “Cambodian diseases.” The State did not allow any independence of thought at all. This is what led to the disease of “people not know how to think,” just mouthing whatever others had them say, the disease of corruption among the mandarins and government officials, the disease fearing the big guys ... There is no need to look far to find the roots of these diseases.

Both of the above-mentioned diseases are feudalist society diseases. Facing the eventuality of being arrested and sent to the Military Court, Hou Yuon and Khieu Samphan fled Phnom Penh on 22 April 1967. However, the absence caused suspicions that the secret police had secretly killed them, and this caused a serious political crisis which forced Lon Nol to resign. Sihanouk personally led a new government that had centralist personages like H.E. Son Sann, the former leader of the Democratic Party, and Norodom Phourissara ... Because of these changes, Vorn Vet, one of the leaders of the Communist Party of Kampuchea who was still working in Phnom Penh, tried to persuade Hou Nim, who was then wanting to flee Phnom Penh too, to postpone for a while and wait for the situation to develop.

Three or four days later, Hou Nim broadcast his communiqué on his loyalty to Sihanouk. However, with the situation having developed this far already, it was very hard to go back, even if the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Kampuchea wanted to do so. After Hou Nim made this communiqué about his loyalty, other leaflets spread in Kampong Thom cast the blame on Sihanouk for the disappearance of both persons [Hou Yuon and Khieu Samphan] and appealed to the people to rise up and rebel.<sup>126</sup> Later, in early May when Sihanouk was visiting Samlaut, the rebels “cursed and grossly insulted him.”<sup>127</sup> Later, when he reached Thpong, he was accused of “aiming to make Kampuchea a satellite of US imperialism.”<sup>128</sup> Furthermore, at that time at Prey Toteung, the constituency of Hou Nim, a rebellion exploded and a vehicle transporting people was burned.

On 2 September after making an attack on Hou Nim, Sihanouk announced the disillusion of the Sino-Cambodian Friendship Association which Hou Nim chaired.

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<sup>126</sup> Ben Kiernan, “How Pol Pot Came to Power” page 261. [Translator note: The author’s Khmer wording here differs slightly from the Kiernan text, and does not mention that the leaflets spread in Kampong Thom were reportedly written by Mam Nai.]

<sup>127</sup> Ben Kiernan, “How Pol Pot Came to Power” page 156 [sic, 256]

<sup>128</sup> Ben Kiernan, “How Pol Pot Came to Power” page 256

On 30 September, Sihanouk called a special meeting at the Prey Toteung High School to accuse Hou Nim in front of those who had voted for him. Sihanouk began to curse and insult Hou Nim, saying that Hou Nim's face was Yuon or Chinese. His final conclusion was that "Hou Nim and his colleagues had excluded themselves from the nation, and Sihanouk advised them to go live in China."<sup>129</sup>

Two days later, Hou Nim received a letter from Vorn Vet which had him get ready to depart on 7 October.

Not long after that, Phouk Chhay, Chairman of the General Association of Cambodian Students, was arrested and sentenced to execution. However, three days later, this sentence was reduced to life imprisonment, and the association was closed. Van Tep Sovan, the owner of the press that published the Pracheachon Newspaper, was tortured to death at the Security Police Central Headquarters.

An Australian historian visiting Phnom Penh wrote that "People are talking with a loathing mixed with fear and ridicule about the tender methods used by Sihanouk's Ministry of Security."

In 1965 only one or two intellectuals fled to the forest. In 1967, this became an important circuit. They did not go out of fear of death; they went in confidence that there had to be some profound change that was unavoidable.<sup>130</sup>

### **K. The rise of general armed struggle in 1968**

In early 1968, the Communist Party of Kampuchea began to open the stage of armed struggle successfully.<sup>131</sup> Sihanouk did not imagine the organizational capabilities of the Khmer Rouge forces. Later Sihanouk said, "Regarding the concerted operations against our army that was isolated, one movement, one tactic was used in Battambang, Takeo, Kampong Chhnang, Kampot, Kampong Speu, Koh Kong ... " Even more importantly, more than 1,000 people in Battambang, Kampot, and Kampong Chhnang fled to the forests following the rebels in early March. Sihanouk said, "So then, I ask that you all help take a look: this is already a full-scale war ..."<sup>132</sup>

Since the right-wing farces had already surrounded Sihanouk, even though Lon Nol resigned from his position as Prime Minister, the general situation did not change. For example, in June 1968, "the National Assembly attacked Sihanouk by saying that loyal people who are not Khmer Rouge at all are being arrested and killed, contrary to the

<sup>129</sup> Ben Kiernan, "How Pol Pot Came to Power" page 169 ( The author's reference to Milton Osbourne, Sihanouk "The Prince of Light and the Prince of Darkness," pages 176 and pages 196-197)

<sup>130</sup> Philip Short, "Pol Pot ..." page 167

<sup>131</sup> Khieu Samphan, "Recent Kampuchean History and My Successive Stances", pages 37-39

<sup>132</sup> Ben Kiernan, "How Pol Pot Came to Power" page 270



constitution and international law ...”<sup>133</sup> In truth, those arrests and killings were acts committed by the “Action Committees” that the “National Assembly” blamed on Sihanouk.

In Phnom Penh, Communist leaflets were being distributed everywhere., even to delegations of the Sangkum legislature. Lon Nol, who had just been reappointed as Prime Minister, readied forces to go on search operations. When the police arrived, there was shooting in the city, and a cadre named Kāk Sim was killed while protecting Vorn Vet. Forty suspects, most of whom were students who had abandoned their studies and were working as coolies and pedicab drivers but some of whom were Public Works officials, Post and Telegraph, at the National Bank, the Railway Service, and even the Ministry of Justice were arrested and killed. Acceding to the government newspaper *Realites Cambodgiennes* they even included a female “who hid secret documents in her bra and underpants.” More importantly, the police discovered two sets of surgical instruments, weapons and ammunition, and printing machines that were about to be sent to the forests, and leaflets and high-powered radios including radios that used the frequency of the Ministry of Security of Sihanouk’s residence.<sup>134</sup>

The suppression campaign that day did not damage the secret networks of the rebels in Phnom Penh very much. Before long, Vorn Vet tried to repair the damage to the network. Nuon Chea, whom the State authority did not see at all, continued fulfilling his important missions, taking on the appearance of a businessman to constantly travel here and there to send guns and grenades and ammunition to the rebels in the forest.<sup>135</sup> However, these search operations showed the capabilities of the rebels to extended their tentacles throughout Phnom Penh.<sup>136</sup> They made the politicians in Phnom Penh tremble with fear. To those, Lon Nol was the only strongman capable of facing theses situations. In December 1969, Lon Nol was appointed temporary Prime Minister to accompany Paen Nuth, who was ill. Seven months later, Lon Nol continued to hold this position along with the positions of Minister of Defense and temporary Chief of General Staff. This was the first time that Sihanouk had permitted one person to hold high military and civilian positions at the same time. He had no other option.<sup>137</sup>

In terms of foreign relations, serious pressure was being placed on Sihanouk by the Americans. Sihanouk still believed that whatever happened, America would lose the war, and his strategy of currying the favor of the communists, the future winner, was correct. But then his wavering possibilities narrowed even more. He had to make a gesture to the Americans. This is what he called “walking a dangerous tightrope.”

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<sup>133</sup> Ben Kiernan, “How Pol Pot Came to Power” page 276

<sup>134</sup> Philip Short, “Pol Pot ...” page 183

<sup>135</sup> Philip Short, “Pol Pot ...” page 181

<sup>136</sup> Philip Short, “Pol Pot ...” page 182

<sup>137</sup> Philip Short, “Pol Pot ...” page 184

He began by inviting Jacqueline Kennedy for a private visit in October. This visit was successful. Later, Chester Bowles, the special envoy of President Nixon [sic, Johnson] was invited during January. This time, the visitor was invited not just for a causal visit. According to the White House, both dignitaries reached an unofficial agreement permitting American forces to cross the border in lightly-populated Ratanakiri and Mondulkiri to chase down Viet Cong guerillas, with the exception of the heavily-populated areas to the south.<sup>138</sup>

In March 1969, President Nixon understood that it was not necessary to ask Sihanouk's opinion. He ordered the American Air Force to secretly bomb locations where the Viet Cong were taking shelter inside Cambodia. During the following twelve months, B-52 aircraft flew 3,000 bombing sorties in eastern Cambodia in operations called "Menu."<sup>139</sup> Sihanouk did not object, not because he agreed, but because the situation required him to repair relations with America. So then, he remained quiet.

When Sihanouk attend the funeral of Ho Chi Minh, he clearly warned the Vietnamese leadership that if they wanted Cambodia to be neutral and open to transport weapons and ammunition to the Viet Cong, they had to demonstrate their support for him. However at that time, the Vietnamese leadership had already lost mastery. They held more than a little anger for Pol Pot. This anger exploded publicly when Lê Duân met Saloth Sar in late 1969. From then on, they determined that Pol Pot was not a pleasing ally. This anger eased after the coup and after the alliance between Norodom Sihanouk and the Cambodian communists. This alliance was to the benefit of everyone. However, this ease was not for long. Conflicts began to appear several days later, after Saloth Sar refused to accept Lê Duân's proposal to set up joint headquarters and after more clashes with Vietnamese forces inside Cambodian territory. These conflicts did not become public, but they retained warm. They caused grudges that were set aside for later when hands were free.

#### **L. All the preconditions for the coup were in existence**

By July 1969, Sihanouk had to rubber-stamp Lon Nol full-rights Prime Minister.<sup>140</sup> Michael Reves, the deputy ambassador, arrived the following month. If Kampuchea wanted to Americans to take them seriously, Kampuchea could not remain under a provisional government any longer. As for the Khmer Rouge, they did not see nay sign at all that they would retreat. As for the Vietnamese communists, their forces vastly increased from 6,000 in mid 1968 to approximately 30,000 one year later. The secret "Menu" bombings had not only failed in their primary mission – the Vietnamese Army headquarters for transporting weapons to the South and the Viet Cong bases had not been smashed – instead, they had pushed the Vietnamese communists even deeper

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<sup>138</sup> Philip Short, "Pol Pot ..." page 181

<sup>139</sup> Philip Short, "Pol Pot ..." page 182

<sup>140</sup> Philip Short, "Pol Pot ..." page 185

inside Kampuchea. It was in this situation that Lon Nol was appointed Prime Minister of the “Government for National Restoration and Salvation.” Norodom Sihanouk announced that the Prime Minister could do anything that he saw as being necessary to revive the seriously-ill economy and put an end to the Khmer Rouge rebellion. There was just condition: he had to maintain the policy of neutrality and non-alignment. But at this stage, Sihanouk also understood that this condition was just words pleasing to the ear.

Sihanouk had to retreat on economic and social issues. That same December, he announced that the program of nationalization and state control of foreign commerce that had been implemented five years earlier had to be modified to open up the private economy to play a broad role and that government would accept outside aid from any direction.<sup>141</sup> In truth, concerning the reforms since 1963, Ben Kiernan wrote the following:

“On these issues, signals had appeared since 1963: The harvest was good, and by 1964 the yields were even higher than they had been in 1963. Rice export increased. This was the first time since 1955 that the country’s balance of trade showed a profit, and in 1965 currency reserves held in the National Bank increased after having fallen for many years. So then, the reforms were clearly successful in terms of the economy. By 1966, after the escalation of the Vietnam War and after a large portion of the rice harvest had been smuggled across the borders, and after the taxed rice that had been exported fell by two-thirds, the government of Sihanouk hung its head low and headed for liquidation.”<sup>142</sup>

When I proposed my reform program to Head of State Sihanouk through Son Sann (at the time H.E. was chairman of the National Bank, and I was in the neutral and independent framework of Sihanouk), national capitalism had great possibilities of prospering in the interests of the nation if only the State provided them with the necessary aid and support. To support national capitalists, it was necessary to fight hard against the various interest groups; as for aid from the outside, it was required only in accordance with the needs of the nation.

What Ben Kiernan’s has written as follows is a clear example of the activities of the various interests about which I am speaking:

“In 1969, a conservative economist wrote about the activities of bad businessmen profiteering in Phnom Penh when the farmers hung upon the early season of the year. Around September 1968, some capitalist came to persuade the government to raise the price of rice a little bit (to raise the morale of the farmers). The results were just the opposite. The middlemen and the rice merchants profited from the increase in the price of rice. By September, the farmers had sold all of their rice and had to buy rice to feed their families. One year later, the value of the riel decreased again and the rise in price of rice had the same results: this caused the author to write: “This made the peasants even angrier.”<sup>143</sup>

<sup>141</sup> Philip Short, “Pol Pot ...” page 185

<sup>142</sup> Ben Kiernan, “How Pol Pot Came to Power” page 209

<sup>143</sup> Ben Kiernan, “How Pol Pot Came to Power” page 278

In truth, raising the price of rice, regardless of the time, would not have profited the farmers, because even today, the great majority of farmers are in debt and even before their rice is harvested the holders of their debts came to collect both the principal and the interest. The farmers must borrow the rice they have just harvested to feed their wives and children for two or three months before they go to Phnom Penh or provincial towns to hire out as coolies, pedicab drivers, or construction workers to get money to send back to their families to buy more rice to eat. But since they had to borrow rice at harvest time, by the next harvest they must make both principal and interest payments. So then, from year to year they fall deeper into debt and are strangled with no hope of getting free. This is what has led to the slavery even today. More fortunate farming families may have some rice left over to eat from three, four, or five months. Whatever amount they fall short must be made up by more borrowing. Some who lack rice to eat for three or four months may avoid borrowing by going in together as husband and wife to make palm sugar for sale. The husbands climb the sugar palms; the wives cook the sugar. Regardless, in general in the Kampuchean countryside, the farmers are not the ones who sell the rice. Raising the price of rice, regardless of when it is raised, just means making the farmers buy even more rice to eat. Understanding this situation leads us to understand the aims of the “Action Committees” that Lon Nol had organized for many years before telling Sihanouk them about in 1967. Now, based on what Ben Kiernan has recently written, we are able to understand that the “capitalists” mentioned in this article had been in business making a living with Lon Nol for a very long time. Those “capitalists” were the most active of all in stealing the nation’s currency and selling on the black market, like I wrote in my book.<sup>144</sup> During 1963-1966, it was all these capitalists that Lon Nol joined with to destroy the economic and financial reforms of 1963. The list of 34 that Lon Nol prepared and presented to Sihanouk in 1963 by adding the names of leftist economist lie Hou Yuon, Hou Nim, and myself was also aimed at the destruction of the economic and financial reforms. In 1965-1966, Lon Nol joined with all those “capitalists” to seize the opportunity of transporting weaponry from the Port of Sihanoukville to the Viet Cong along the border to transport smuggle customs-free rice on military trucks.<sup>145</sup> This is a joke of history: Sihanouk’s Minister of Defense was a smuggler who “caused Sihanouk’s State to lose two-thirds of its budget and pushed this State to the brink of liquidation.” Now, Lon Nol was appointed as the Prime Minister of the “Government of Restoration and National Salvation” who had the right to do anything to revive the economy. Shortly before this, immediately after being appointed by the elected Assembly, he immediately thought of “eliminating” smuggling! The result was that the peasants in Samlaut rebelled. When the peasants in Samlaut rebelled, Lon Nol had the opportunity to chase down and behead the peasants and the communists whose strings, Lon Nol claimed, were being pulled by Viet Cong and North Vietnamese puppet masters.

In truth, the Vietnamese were very worried about Sihanouk’s regime being shaken like this. What little remained of Sihanouk’s policy of neutrality was of great value to

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<sup>144</sup> Khieu Samphan, “The Recent History of Kampuchea and my Successive Stances” page 14

<sup>145</sup> William Shawcross, “The Tragedy That No One Thought About” page 58

them after what had just been lost and the seriously damaged during the recent New Year's offensive.<sup>146</sup>

On the side of the struggle, the problem was a serious shortage of weapons and ammunition. In November 1969, Saloth Sar, with Khieu Ponnary and their aide Pàng and two bodyguards, once again departed on foot along the Ho Chi Minh Trail.<sup>147</sup> He hoped to explain to Lê Duân that since at the time Sihanouk had already become the tool of Lon Nol, the time had arrived when they had to help the struggle.

But Saloth Sar had chosen the wrong time. Two months before this, Sihanouk had travelled to Hanoi to attend the funeral of Ho Chi Minh and had clearly warned the Vietnamese leadership that if they wanted Kampuchea to be neutral and open to transporting weapons and ammunition to the Viet Cong, they had to demonstrate support for him.

So at that time, to Lê Duân, Saloth Sar was a serious bother. He insisted on asking Saloth Sar to stop the rebellion and turn back to political struggle. Later Saloth Sar wrote that the discussion were carried out in a very tense atmosphere.<sup>148</sup> The conflict between the two of them "could never be reconnected." He added that the Vietnamese delegation ... could not hold back their anger ... and their fits. The atmosphere ... was so tense that some members of the Cambodian delegation who had never encountered anything like this were very strongly shaken. When speaking of this, Saloth Sar pointed to the illness of Khieu Ponnary, his wife, that appeared when the Cambodian delegation reached Beijing. Ponnary began to have unusual attitudes. A Chinese official who met Khieu Ponnary at that time recalled, "She opposed the Vietnamese to the point that no one could even use the word "Vietnam" in front of her." That Chinese official asked himself what had made her become like that.<sup>149</sup> From the day the delegation arrived in Beijing, she fell ill to the point that they had to carry her and place her on a stretcher. Long afterwards, they discovered that her illness was a nervous disorder that led her to become afraid. It was already too late to diagnose and treat her. Saloth Sar's cook Moeun recalled that one day their guard placed a glass of water for Saloth Sar. "Then his wife glanced at him like she wanted to tell him not to drink the water because the Yuon had poisoned it; then she got up and took the glass of water away, threw it out, and put a new glass in its place." Moeun said that she had observed Pol Pot's expression of pity. After the crisis passed, she seemed to improve and her attitude was norms, but frequently she relapsed into crisis, and she was always fearful and unable to sleep. She kept screaming "Vietnamese troops are coming! They are looking to kill us!" In the end, Saloth Sar, who also could not sleep well, sent his wife along with Moeun whenever she was in crisis so that he would not have difficulty sleeping because of his wife's screams of fear about the enemy and her always seeing things like this.

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<sup>146</sup> Ben Kiernan, "How Pol Pot Came to Power" page 275

<sup>147</sup> Philip Short, "Pol Pot ..." page 188

<sup>148</sup> Philip Short, "Pol Pot ..." page 188 (the author's reference to the Black Book, page 32)

<sup>149</sup> Philip Short, "Pol Pot ..." page 210

They never found a clear cause for his wife's illness. Close friends thought that it came from her never having had children, and they thought that when she was near death she liked to have children around her, and that helped her attitude return to normal. She knew that Saloth Sar wanted children, but her husband never said anything about that.

But as to what led to her crisis was when she and the delegation were staying in China, just recently, her illness was not related to Saloth Sar, and had even less to do with Khmer Rouge policies because those policies had not yet even been written down on paper and had not been implemented when she began to be shaken. In truth, her pitiful condition could be said to be due to her concentrating on worrying about the entire Cambodian nation, about some danger that awaited the entire nation.

At that same time in Phnom Penh, Sihanouk was unable to free himself from a situation that was applying more and more pressure to him. However, the previous month when he went to attend the funeral of Ho Chi Minh, he unsuccessfully tried to persuade Hanoi not to dispatch their forces too visibly. Now, when Sihanouk was released from the hospital, he thought he would return home through Moscow and Beijing in order to request the Soviet and Chinese leadership to use their influence to pressure those under their protection to be somewhat quiet. To give gravitas to the words he would speak in Moscow and Beijing, Sihanouk asked Lon Nol to organize anti-Vietnamese "demonstrations that started on their own" one or two days before Sihanouk arrived in Moscow and Beijing.<sup>150</sup>

On 8 March, anti-Viet Cong demonstrations exploded in Svay Rieng and in many other districts of that province. The next morning in Phnom Penh, students demonstrated in front of the National Assembly and they made a motion demanding that the Viet Cong withdraw from Cambodian territory. Two days later, on the 11<sup>th</sup>, tens of thousands of government workers reserved for this goal walked toward the embassy of the South Vietnamese Provisionary Revolutionary Government. Despite the police presence there, the crowds pushed from behind by government agents pushed embassy vehicles and threw bicycles and soldiers in civilian clothing attacked the embassy building and threw table sand book cabinets and papers out the windows from the upper storey and burned them.<sup>151</sup> After plundering there for one hour, the crowds walked toward the North Vietnamese Embassy. They smashed everything there. The rebellion continued here and there and private stores and some of the people's houses were attacked and smashed.<sup>152</sup>

They found it hard to say whether or not the smashing of the embassies had been Sihanouk's intention, and they also found it hard to say whether or not Lon Nol and Sirimatak hoped that the atmosphere of violence and the rage of the masses created the opposition to the "hereditary enemy" would then create the necessary political preconditions for them to continue their activities even more strongly.

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<sup>150</sup> Philip Short, "Pol Pot ..." page 194

<sup>151</sup> Philip Short, "Pol Pot ..." page 188

<sup>152</sup> Philip Short, "Pol Pot ..." page 211

What is clear is that Sihanouk warned “dignitaries intending to irreparably destroy the Cambodia’s friendship with the socialist block,” and he said that when he returned to the country he would ask the Cambodian people to choose between Sihanouk and them.<sup>153</sup>

On 13 March, after much hesitation Sihanouk boarded an aircraft from Paris to Moscow. On 18 March, Sihanouk was brought down by the National Assembly. Sihanouk learned of this in Moscow when Prime Minister Kosygin escorted him to board an aircraft to Beijing.

This was not the first time that the Soviet Union had received a third-world head of state when they were suddenly removed from their country and Kosygin informed them that the Soviet Union did not know what the Soviets could do about it.

As for the Chinese, they had a different reaction. Since 1965, the Chinese had looked at Vietnam through the microscope of the Chinese-Soviet conflict. Beijing was the largest source supplying military aid and had tried with all its might to keep Vietnam on its side. The next morning when the aircraft landed in Beijing, Sihanouk saw the entire diplomatic apparatus standing in line waiting to show him their respect. Zhou Enlai was also present. In the car along the way, the Chinese Prime Minister asked Sihanouk’s opinion, and Sihanouk responded immediately, “I will return to my country to fight.” Zhou Enlai in turn warned him, “War is long-term, difficult, dangerous, and sometimes causes hopelessness.” He proposed instead that Sihanouk take a day to think it over again.<sup>154</sup>

In truth, Sihanouk was not yet at all clear in his heart about what he had to do. On the aircraft, Sihanouk told his wife Monique that he wanted to reside in his villa in Mougins on the south coast of France. His initial reaction when he arrived was to question the French ambassador to China Etienne Manac’h about the possibility of granting him asylum. There was precedent: when the Vietnamese Emperor, Bao Dai, ended his days on the Riviera. It had been the same with King Farouk of Egypt, but Sihanouk did not admire these men.<sup>155</sup>

The next morning, Sihanouk told Zhou Enlai that he had made his decision. In a message to the Cambodian people on Radio Beijing, Sihanouk attacked the group that had carried out the coup and he said that he would fight for “justice,” meaning for “revenge.”

On 21 March, Vietnamese Prime Minister Phan Van Dong also travelled by air to Beijing. He asked Sihanouk whether or not he wanted to cooperate with the Khmer Rouge, adding that if the answer were yes, there would have to be contacts at leadership

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<sup>153</sup> Philip Short, “Pol Pot ...” page 195

<sup>154</sup> Philip Short, “Pol Pot ...” page 198

<sup>155</sup> Philip Short, “Pol Pot ...” page 198

level and the various other levels.<sup>156</sup> The Vietnamese Prime Minister informed Zhou Enlai that “ Sihanouk said nothing at all other than that in general he had decided to struggle. Sihanouk did not see what he wanted us to do.” The Vietnamese leader also met with Saloth Sar. At the time, Saloth Sar saw that their facial expressions were different from what they had been during the two months when they previously met. Now, everything was “friendship and solidarity (there were just words of friendship and hugs ...). There was a 180-degree change.”<sup>157</sup> The alliance between Norodom Sihanouk and the Cambodian communists was now useful to everyone. Phan Van Dong clearly promised Sihanouk “on his oath” in front of Zhou Enlai that Vietnam would respect the “independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity” of Kampuchea “within the present borders.”<sup>158</sup> But at the time, not one Vietnamese leader asked himself the question that if Saloth Sar had acted in accordance with the pressure of Lê Duân the previous month to cease armed struggle, how the situation would have turned out. They were a big country: they were never wrong.

Two days later on 23 March, Sihanouk broadcast an appeal which everyone knows about. Sihanouk presented the initial draft to Zhou Enlai, and Zhou Enlai sent it to Saloth Sar. Saloth Sar proposed minor changes, in particular removing points related to anything talking about socialism. The Chinese Prime Minister informed Saloth Sar that “The Cambodian communists must think of the general situation inside the country and must not think of old contradictions ... You all must cooperate to set up a government united in opposition to a common enemy.” Saloth Sar required no further explanation. However, he did not go to meet Sihanouk as Zhou Enlai had anticipated. Instead, he wrote a letter of support in the name of Khieu Samphan, Hou Yuon, and Hou Nim, all of whom most Cambodians assumed had died at the order of Sihanouk three years earlier. The letter was given to Sihanouk on 26 March. It seemed to have been sent from a resistance base inside Cambodia. No one told Sihanouk that Saloth Sar was also in Beijing at that time. In early April 1970, Saloth Sar returned to Hanoi. Then he and Khieu Ponnary were received by Lê Duân, Pham Van Dong, Vo Nguyên Giap, and various other members of the Politburo of the Vietnamese Workers’ Party. Before they returned along the Ho Chi Minh Trail to return home, Lê Duân asked to meet Saloth Sar to discuss military cooperation.<sup>159</sup>

In Saloth Sar’s absence, Nuon Chea was with Sao Phim at Krabao on the day of the coup meeting with East Zone cadres and instructed armed propaganda teams to take control of villages, subdistricts and districts everywhere that was possible. One week after the broadcast of Sihanouk’s appeal, Vietnamese officials met him to propose military cooperation. Initially, Nuon Chea was hesitant. However, when the Vietnamese emphasized that no matter what the Cambodian understanding was, they had to defend the locations where they were taking shelter inside Cambodia, and Nuon Chea accepted cooperation, but he did not yet speak in detail. To the contrary, he sent a letter to Saloth

<sup>156</sup> Philip Short, “Pol Pot ...” page 198

<sup>157</sup> Philip Short, “Pol Pot ...” page 199

<sup>158</sup> Philip Short, “Pol Pot ...” page 199

<sup>159</sup> Philip Short, “Pol Pot ...” page 203



Sar in Hanoi describing what had been proposed and how he had responded. Now Lê Duân wanted to know what Sar's opinion was.<sup>160</sup>

Sar said that the negotiations had been difficult. The Vietnamese began with a proposal to send 5,000 guns to equip Khmer Rouge units. The Cambodians agreed to accept them, but Lê Duân also proposed to organize joint commands. To Saloth Sar, this proposal reminded him of the 1950s era, when Cambodians were the "commanders" but the Vietnamese "deputy commanders" made all the decisions. He remembered that the Cambodians had fallen under a Vietnamese protectorate. Saloth Sar used the pretext that while he was outside the country, he had no mandate from the central Committee of the Communist Party of Kampuchea to discuss this issue. However, his personal opinion was "He understood that the establishment of joint command was of no gain." Past experience showed that joint commands were sources of disputes and arguments, and in political terms joint commands would everyone to think that the Cambodian struggle was a satellite of Vietnam, and neither Sihanouk nor the Cambodian people would accept this. Lê Duân acted as if he understood.<sup>161</sup>

However, there were still many other fundamental problems yet to be resolved. For example, to the leadership of the Communist Party of Kampuchea, Kampuchea and Vietnam were two countries, two nations, and two peoples. It was clear that in the struggle against a common enemy, everyone had to be in solidarity and help one another. However, since they were two countries, two nations, and two peoples, there had to be two Parties, two Armies, two sovereign State authorities. The Vietnamese armed forces had to carry out activities in South Vietnam. As for the Cambodian struggle, the Cambodians had to be left to fight inside the framework of Cambodian sovereignty. The recruitment of personnel to join the army, the organization of the army, and the organization of the State authorities at every level inside Cambodia must be under Cambodian sovereignty. Not respecting all these fundamental principles had been the root of the constant clashes between these two forces since the first day that Vietnamese forces had struck into Kampuchea. As for the Vietnamese side, they always raised a different principle: "Indochina is a single battlefield." So then, after the coup, the alliance between Norodom Sihanouk and the Cambodian communists seemed from the outside to the erasure of the contradictions between the two Parties during the past more than 15 years. However, there were still fundamental contradictions between the two Parties, because the problem was the relationship between the two Parties: Were they equal, or not? Would they mutually respect their sovereignty, or not? But, after that time, the Vietnamese Workers' Party clearly knew that the Communist Party of Kampuchea would not subordinate itself to them easily.

So then, this why beginning at that time, both Parties were in constant contradictions that were occasionally were seen by outsiders and were sometimes buried. After the 1970 coup, the contradictions were buried, but the CPK had to both fight the Americans and Lon Nol and counter the large-country ambitions of the Vietnamese. By

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<sup>160</sup> Philip Short, "Pol Pot ..." page 203

<sup>161</sup> Philip Short, "Pol Pot ..." page 203

1973, the contradictions had reappeared.<sup>162</sup> In 1976, the Vietnamese decided to get rid of their displeasing ally straight away. However, no one has any understanding at all of that decision.

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<sup>162</sup> Khieu Samphan, "The Recent History of Kampuchea and My Successive Stances" page 56.

## Part Two

### **A number of issues that appeared after 1975**

This Part two is the history of the long journey that patiently moved toward the establishment of a Cambodian political party without any goal other than liberating itself from being a Vietnamese protectorate, the protectorate they had placed on Cambodia since the Nine-Year War before the 1954 Geneva Agreements. It was a journey of resolute steps toward independence, but one that was extremely cautious to avoid anything that might impact the solidarity between the two peoples that destiny had required join together to fight a common enemy. The Kampuchean people agreed to act as an ally of the bigger Vietnam, but they refused to be under Vietnamese command any longer. But for several decades, due to the direct requirements of the Vietnamese struggle, the Vietnamese transformed their military activities inside Kampuchea into an ideological duty almost without realizing it, acting as if they had the mission of bringing civilization to the Cambodians as if it were the era of the Emperor Ming Mang in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. And during the second half of the 1960s, Vietnam still continued to insist that the Cambodian people follow a path that would lead them to their deaths. As for the Vietnamese, they had no capability to help the Cambodians in return. This is why the Cambodians refused to follow them. This was what the Vietnamese understood as arrogance: not only was it arrogant, it impacted their forces and their interests very seriously. For example, during 1967-1969, the Americans came and attacked them in Ratanakiri and Mondulkiri and bombed their refuges with B-52s because Pol Pot had refused to listen to them. They refused to accept their situation, and to escape danger, they made this straightforward accusation. Even more seriously, after the 1970 coup, Cambodia was in the grasp of Vietnam, but they were disappointed because of Pol Pot and the CPK. It was after both countries had achieved their respective great victories, when Vietnamese hands were free, that Vietnam decided to finish off Pol Pot and the CPK. But the Vietnamese were more skillful in their tactics than the Soviets when the Soviet Union placed sanctions on Hungary in 1956. The Vietnamese used the appearance of border disputes to disguise their goals. No one knew who was right and who was wrong about the land and sea border disputes, but they saw the DK as being bad and they wondered why a small country would dare make trouble with a large country like this. They did not understand and had not yet meticulously researched how the ultimatum of the Vietnamese might influence internal matters inside Kampuchea.

We will try to assess this issue in detail along with several other issues that were directly or indirectly related.

## **The disputes with Vietnam: Who was the instigator?**

**First, what was this issue of Vietnam demanding modifications of the sea border?**

In order understand the origins of the war between Democratic Kampuchea and the Democratic Peoples' Republic of Vietnam it is necessary to understand that the Vietnamese demand to modify the sea border in May 1976 was actually an ultimatum that the Vietnamese placed upon Democratic Kampuchea.

A response going along with that would have meant death. This is because the Communist Party of Kampuchea would have exploded and come apart, because a clear majority of the membership would have refused.

A response of refusal, and Democratic Kampuchea would clearly have had border troubles until war broke out without it being discovered who had violated whom.

This problem should never have occurred at all, because in the negotiations between Kampuchea in the Norodom Sihanouk era between Sihanouk and the South Vietnamese National Liberation Front in 1967, the Brevie Line was accepted as the "present border" dividing the seas between the two countries.<sup>163</sup>

**Second, a key document, the minutes of the CPK Standing Committee on 14 May 1976.**

This document was published in its entirety in Ben Kiernan's book.<sup>164</sup> In this document, Nei Sarann (alias Ya), chairman of the Cambodian delegation, describes the theme of what the Vietnamese delegation of Phan Hien had stated during the morning as follows: "that recently, Cambodian troops entered and attacked Vietnamese territory, that the Brevie Line has no basis, that if Vietnamese agreed to accept it, that would impact Vietnamese sovereignty, and that the previous Vietnamese stance had no basis whatsoever because it was unsigned, and that to be appropriate ... the sea border must be drawn giving each side one half ..."

This document makes it clear that the Khmer Rouge leadership was under Vietnamese pressure and was seriously worried. I, who attended and listened, was worried, as were the others.

For example, they might read the words of Nuon Chea when he said, "They want to kill us through negotiations. So then, we must accept the present situation. A situation in which the borders are not clearly demarcated is better than endless discussions." Then Vorn Vet said, "It looks like they will not easily back off. Further negotiation is useless. Their view is that they are a big country, and they will refuse to stoop to accept our

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<sup>163</sup> Nayan Chanda, "Brother Enemy" page 33

<sup>164</sup> Ben Kiernan, "The Pol Pot Regime" pages 115-118

proposals. Our Kampuchea is trying to protect our interests. As for the Vietnamese, they are always looking to make a profit.” Then Vorn Vet agreed that it was better to put an end to the negotiation. He said, “So then, we should postpone the negotiation to maintain a situation of calm and to avoid any clashes so that we can maintain peaceful co-existence until we have sufficient forces and enough food to eat.” Then he added, “It will not be easy for us to do this. In the future, there will be more border clashes.” Regardless, he stuck to his opinion to put an end to the negotiation.

Then Son Sen pondered the issue back and forth, and then came to the understanding that the negotiations had to be ended. He said, “I agree with Brother (Nuon Chea) that we must find a way ... to end the negotiation by maintaining the existing atmosphere.”

Then Pol Pot stated his opinion. He began by saying that “I have nothing to say that is any different from what has already been said. I just want to add some opinion ... there have been routine contradictions with Vietnam, and we are not so stupid as to think that there must not be contradictions ... Now and in the future, there will always be contradictions. We must strengthen our stances ... In the future, if we stand tight to this experience, we will be able to negotiate with anyone. So then, this is a very big lesson ... Even though we have not resolved the issue, we have gained experience.” Ben Kiernan noted that the negotiation was not aimed at resolving the issue, but was aimed at learning. The lesson was that we could not negotiate with Vietnam. On the lesson, my opinion differs from Ben Kiernan’s. I will have the opportunity to return to this matter later. But now, we will listen further to the opinion of Pol Pot: “ ... In Kampuchea, there is nothing that is normal. This is because of the history of Vietnam ... They are trying to profit from us; this is their normal activity ... Their expansionist strategy endlessly blocks any acceptance of our Brevie Line ... They present themselves as a big country in order to threaten Kampuchea by putting a gun to our heads ...”

Finally, Pol Pot reached his conclusion, and he proposed the following measures: “We have reached a deadlock. To continue to negotiate would be very dangerous because they want us to make concessions to them ... If we continue down this path, we will be tricked by them; they will lead us to tensions, and we will lose ... It is better for us to end it. But, how do we end it? We should discuss that.”

“The day after tomorrow in our response, we must tell them that we want friendship and solidarity ... Nei Sarann’s delegation must tell them that relations between Kampuchea and Vietnam must be constantly looked after and improved, and they must add, “On this basis, we have confidence that in the end we will be able to resolve the problem ... The delegation must again make it clear that all the borders between our two countries were drawn by the French, and we must tell them that we do not accept two lines, one to demarcate the seas and one to demarcate the islands. We can accept only one line.”

They might note that, as always, I expressed no opinion. I knew that even if I spoke, I had nothing more to add. I was stunned that a Vietnamese leader was able to

open his mouth to speak like that. To them, the words “friendship” and “solidarity” had no meaning whatsoever. Only their immediate interests were important.

In the recent past, it was on the basis of their communiqué that Norodom Sihanouk supported the Vietnamese struggle by permitting them to deploy in refuges inside Cambodian territory along the border and even helped arrange weapons transport to assist the Vietnamese struggle, and because of this he was overthrown in a coup by Lon Nol and the Americans.

If the Khmer Rouge had not permitted the Vietnamese struggle to use Cambodian territory as a backstop and had not permitted them to buy Cambodian rice to feed their troops, would the Vietnamese have been able to liberate the South and reunify their nation?

In a word, for this “friendship,” “fraternity,” and “solidarity,” the Kampuchean people had shed a great deal of blood.

Now, suddenly they come and say that the previous Vietnamese stance “is entirely without foundation because it was not signed.”

This is the history of the relationship between the two countries and the two Parties. This is why I have tried to write down and lay out this history from beginning to end, even though I had to use some language that is not often used these days.

### **Third, specific events: the disputes with Vietnam had begun in 1975.**

In actuality, the clashes between Vietnamese forces and the Khmer Rouge never abated after the day that the Vietnamese penetrated deeply into the country during 1970. In truth, after the liberation of the country, Kampuchea never knew peace.

In his book entitled “Brother Number One” David Chandler provided an extract of the works of Chou Chet when he spoke about the “nibbling attacks” at various locations ... and the deep strikes into the Northeast along the border during 1976.<sup>165</sup>

But Nei Sarann spoke more clearly because he was personally involved in the issue. Prior to 1970, he was an important cadre in the East Zone Committee, but after the war broke out after the coup, he was moved to assist the Military Staff help receive weapons from Vietnam, transport them, and hand them over the Kampuchean resistance forces along the Kampuchea-Lao border following the principle that the Cambodians provided rear support areas and sold food supplies to Vietnamese resistance forces and the Vietnamese helped transport for Kampuchean resistance forces. After liberation (after 1975) and after the troubles and fighting with the Vietnamese, he went to help look after the Northeastern border, as he describes below:

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<sup>165</sup> David Chandler, “Brother Number One” page 133

“Between October and November 1975, due to the repeated Vietnamese violations and aggression inside Ratanakiri Province, the Party assigned me to cooperate with Zone 103 (the Old Northeast) to organize plans to attack and drive Vietnamese networks out of our territory.”<sup>166</sup>

At the time, Nei Sarann (alias Ya) received the following instructions:

“At this time the Party raises two measures and principles:

- Use diplomatic contacts, meaning negotiate a resolution to prevent bloodshed as the primary measure.

- If diplomatic resolution was not fruitful, meaning they still violate our territory, we must prepare military measures, that is, attack and drive them from our territory. But the Party instructed that if though we attack militarily, the goal is that diplomatic measures are primary.”<sup>167</sup>

In late November 1975, Vietnamese forces withdrew from points (in Ratanakiri) “where they had violated us.”

Later he was appointed Northeast Zone Secretary. He said, “After the Fourth Party Congress in early February 1976, the Party reorganized the Northeast Zone (Zone 109) that had four provinces, Kratie, Mondulkiri, Ratanakiri, and Steung Trèng. I was assigned Zone 109 Secretary.

When I first set out on the journey, the Party instructed me to think only of border affairs for a while during February and March 1976. The Organization contacted and invited the Yuon to assign a delegation to meet and negotiate with us in Ratanakiri.

When we negotiated with them, we spoke about the border problems in Ratanakiri and Mondulkiri, in particular Mondulkiri, were serious fighting ongoing. We said that they were in our territory. They accused us of using a different map that demarcated that territory as belonging to Kampuchea.

The discussions and negotiations had not ended when we decided on a temporary cease fire in Mondulkiri; everyone was to stay in place temporarily and wait for negotiations and a general solution by both Parties and governments.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> “The Confessions of Khmer Rouge Leaders”, compiled by the Samleng Yuvachon Khmer Newspaper, page 225

<sup>167</sup> “The Confessions of Khmer Rouge Leaders”, compiled by the Samleng Yuvachon Khmer Newspaper, page 225

<sup>168</sup> “The Confessions of Khmer Rouge Leaders”, compiled by the Samleng Yuvachon Khmer Newspaper, page 226

It was the Kampuchean side that initiated a proposal for a cease fire and invited the Vietnamese for high-level negotiations. Accordingly, there were negotiations in Phnom Penh in May 1976.

But on that occasion, suddenly the Vietnamese delegation presented an ultimatum, as described above. They insisted on drawing a new boundary right in the middle of the waters between Koh Trol and Keb. Doing that was cutting off and taking away from Kampuchea the navigable waters in front of Keb and Kampot and the deep waters east of the Kampong Saom Port.

**Fourth, one month after the ultimatum, there was more strong fighting with Vietnam.**

Ya clarified this issue. Ya wrote:

“In late June 1976 and early July 1976, there were serious clashes on the border between Snuol District in Kratie ... ” There was constant and repeated fighting. At the time, I was in the July 1976 meeting of the Center. Brother Nuon instructed me to write a telegram telling Tu Cam (a Vietnamese liaison cadre who had the duty of liaising and resolving various issues along the border with Kampuchea) about events ... proposing a cease fire and proposing a meeting of delegations in Kratie Province (Kampuchea) and Sông Be (in Vietnam) to negotiate and resolve the border issues in friendship and prevent bloodshed.” The negotiations were fruitless.

Ya also clarified that afterwards, the Party Standing Committee decided to have the Kratie Province border defense forces pull back 1,000 to 2,000 meters from the border to avoid tensions.

Regarding this pull-back, the Organization also instructed Mondulkiri; the primary objective was to prevent border tensions, but also not doing anything to cause the Yuon to violate and take our territory.<sup>169</sup>

Afterwards, from reading the books of various researchers, the situation seemed to be quiet. But according to various researchers the fighting seemed to begin again starting in early 1977.<sup>170</sup> Because of whom? Since the Cambodians had already pulled back from the border, it had to have been caused by the Vietnamese side. They might have been standing on their map. They might have been saying that even though the Cambodians have pulled back far from the border, in fact they have still not left Vietnamese territory.

After making the December 1976 communiqué in the form of a decision of the VWP on their efforts to protect and strengthen and expand the special relationship

<sup>169</sup> “The Confessions of Khmer Rouge Leaders”, compiled by the Samleng Yuvachon Khmer Newspaper, page 228

<sup>170</sup> Philip Short, “Pol Pot ...” page 372



between the Vietnamese people, the Lao people, and the Cambodian people ... in February, Hanoi sent their Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Phang Van Loi on a secret visit to Phnom Penh. They came to propose cooperation with Kampuchea by sending [back] Cambodian refugees who had fled to Vietnam, and once again they invited the Cambodian leadership to an Indochina summit meeting with the Vietnamese and the Lao. Please recall that a similar invitation had been made for a meeting in June 1976. At that time, the Cambodians had agreed in principle, but the Cambodians insisted on negotiating and resolving the border issues first. This was because the CPK had already raised this issue once. After June 1975, only three months after both countries were at peace, a high-level CPK delegation made a visit to Hanoi and asked for an agreement on friendship and long-term cooperation between the Parties of both countries and also asked for the start of negotiations on border issues. However, the Vietnamese side avoided discussions on both these proposals. Since that time, an agreement of friendship and long-term cooperation had been put aside for a while, but the resolution of border issues was still an important test for the Khmer Rouge to learn about the Vietnamese attitude, to learn whether or not the summit meeting was a meeting between the leaders of sovereign countries. However, they failed the test because the Vietnamese used this opportunity to place an ultimatum on Kampuchea. So then, the summit meeting was a failure. Because of both these situations, nothing at all had changed, and the second invitation to a summit meeting was rejected straight away by the Kampuchean side.

During March and April, the clashes continued, and bitter letters of complaint were exchanged.<sup>171</sup> On 30 April, Khmer Rouge forces accompanied with artillery support entered Vietnamese territory, killed people, and heavy-handedly smashed villages. The Vietnamese side took international journalists to look at the sites to prepare international opinion for an invasion of Kampuchea. If the communiqué in December 1976 had been accompanied by specific measures like pulling Vietnamese soldiers far back from the border like Kampuchea had already taken in order to reduce border tensions that had existed since the Vietnamese ultimatum, perhaps the events that the Vietnamese claimed had led to the war would not have happened. Since no measures at all were taken, when Phnom Penh listened to the December 1976 communiqué, it seemed to be an indirect accusation that the Khmer Rouge had destroyed the special relationship between the three peoples of Indochina. Furthermore, Philip Short discovered that the issue of Khmer Rouge entering and attacking Vietnamese territory did not occur without Vietnamese trouble-making as the Vietnamese propaganda had claimed. Internal CPK military telegrams, credible since they were not for distribution, counted 15 clashes that the Khmer Rouge charged had been caused by the Vietnamese during 1-29 April.<sup>172</sup>

Furthermore, if Vietnam had resolutely protected and strengthened and expanded the special relationship between the Vietnamese, Lao, and Cambodian peoples ... why then did they use a disagreement on a piece or two of land or a small bend in a sea border to make trouble and cause war between the two countries? So then, from whatever angle

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<sup>171</sup> Philip Short, "Pol Pot ..." page 372

<sup>172</sup> Philip Short, "Pol Pot ..." page 372

it is examined, the border problems were only a pretext to cause war so that Vietnam could achieve its ambition of an Indochina Federation over Kampuchea and Laos.

In truth, before taking major measures, the Vietnamese proposed a high-level meeting to put an end to the bloodshed. However, the important issue to the Cambodians was that they wanted to know whether or not Hanoi had abandoned its strategy of “the python crushing the baby chick.” However, the Vietnamese not only refused to withdraw their ultimatum, but also on 12 May 1977, the Vietnamese announced a 200-mile economic monopoly zone along their coast, presenting the Cambodians with a *fait accompli*. So then, the Cambodian side asked for time to deliberate and proposed a military pull-back from the respective borders like they had already made after the serious clashes in Snuol. No response was seen, and artillery fire began again on both sides of the border. Tens of thousands of civilians had to be evacuated out of the region to prevent the worst outcome.<sup>173</sup>

#### **Fifth, the DK stance up until April 1977**

When we examine this somewhat meticulously, we see the following:

- Point 1. Immediately after the clashes began, CPK instructions were to negotiate. That was the primary measure.

- Point 2. Military measures were used, but only when negotiations were not able to resolve things. But ... even though there were military attacks, the aim, diplomatic measures ... will still be important.

- Point 3. Let me emphasize Ya’s phrase “... The Party instructed me to think just of border affairs for a while, February and March 1976.” That meant that the thoughts of the Khmer Rouge leadership the border troubles were normal border disputes between lower echelons that could be completely resolved within just two or three months.

- Point 4. No visible Vietnamese initiatives were taken to relax the atmosphere. The upper-echelon negotiations did occur were Cambodian initiatives. The Vietnamese just used the negotiations to create additional troubles.

Examining the above, we see that:

**A.** The troubles that had occurred along the border since October and November 1975 were military pressure to make the Cambodians accept their May 1976 ultimatum.

**B.** The troubles that occurred in later in Snuol in Kratie Province in late June and early July 1976 were also military pressure to make the Cambodian side accept their May 1976 ultimatum.

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<sup>173</sup> Philip Short, “Pol Pot ...” page 373

The words of Lê Duân to a Soviet diplomat on 16 November 1976 also make this clear. The VWP Secretary said, “Sooner or later, this country (meaning Kampuchea) will come to live with Vietnam. The Cambodians have no other path.”<sup>174</sup> With this pressure, it is very true that the Cambodians had no other path.

It is true that Pol Pot did not know the theme of what Lê Duân had told the Soviet diplomat: that now seeds of hatred were again being spread. I still remember that at the time, Pol Pot spoke about the python-crushing-the-baby-chick strategy” as a strategy of both striking from the outside and agitating from the inside. Later our lower echelons learned of clear proof that the Vietnamese were sticking their hands in to stir up the CPK internally and create contradictions between members of the Cambodian struggle to cause them to fight one another and shed blood.

Now, it is clearly apparent that it was not Democratic Kampuchea that made trouble with the vastly stronger Vietnamese. It was the Vietnamese that used the border troubles as a pretext, as an opportunity to force Kampuchea to accept living under a Vietnamese protectorate. Now we are able to understand why Vietnam avoided accepting a friendship and long-term cooperation agreement between the two countries and two peoples and refused to negotiate border issues like the high-level CPK delegation had proposed in June 1975.<sup>175</sup> It was because the Vietnamese refused to recognize the CPK. Instead, they presented Kampuchea with an ultimatum to pressure Kampuchea to go to an Indochina summit meeting. This was because they wanted a treaty like the one they had made with Laos in July 1977 that gave Vietnam the right to station their troops in Lao territory in order to “fight against all the plans and activities of sabotage ... of foreign reactionary forces.” These words were aimed at the various countries in the region and at the Peoples’ Republic of China as well.

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<sup>174</sup> Stephen Morris, ““Why Vietnam Invaded Cambodia”” page 96

<sup>175</sup> Khieu Samphan, “Recent Cambodian History and My Successive Stances” page 79

## **What were the original reasons that led to the killing?**

I can only partially answer this, but I understand that my findings, though incomplete, may be of use in the sense that they might mark the trail for further lengthy research. Much has already been found, but there needs to be additional objective, unbiased research done without anger or hatred.

### **First, a number of strange events occurred inside the country from February until April 1976:**

In February 1976, there was a large explosion in Siem Reap. Even today, no one can clearly speak about the reasons.

Then came an event that no one had anticipated.

In late March, a scandal related to a high-level cadre, Koy Thuon, reached the ears of Pol Pot. In general, they knew that the subject had a weak point in terms of women. He had also organized Arts Teams for his entertainment. This had a great impact on his leadership.

Accordingly, the Standing Committee removed him from his position as North Zone Secretary and made him Minister of Commerce instead, a lesser position that was not related to directly leading the people. But he continued acting as he had previously. He arranged for one of his former lovers to marry a combatant named Long. This was a tactic to cut-off Long from another girl Koy Thuon was pleased with. The combatant was angered and spread this information everywhere. Koy Thuon, alias Thuch, learned of this and had Long killed.

The explosion in Siem Reap on 25 February was a major issue for Pol Pot, and for two months he had not be able to discover the causes. Furthermore, Koy Thuon's behavior showed that he was not a proper revolutionary, at least for a senior leader. From this idea, he was connected to the event in Siem Reap, which had previously been under his governance along with his close colleague Soth. So then, the question was posed, "Had his removal from his position created such a contradiction with him that he carried out such an act to destroy the revolution?" In an unclear situation, and to prevent all possible eventualities, he was confined to a house under the monitoring of the Standing Committee.

But six days after the detention of Koy Thuon, another strange event occurred. At dawn on 2 April, a grenade exploded behind the palace. The suspect responded that he had thrown it at the order of two military cadres of East Zone Division 170 that had recently been transferred to the Central Staff and was deployed in southeast Phnom Penh from Chbar Ampeou to the Monivong Bridge, Norodom Blvd, the palace, and Watt Phnom. These two cadres implicated the Division 170 commander Chan Chakrei and

another important cadre of the East Zone, Chhouk, the Sector 24 Secretary in Kampong Trabaek District.<sup>176</sup>

### **Second, the first arrests of high-level cadres.**

Surrounding the bombing in Siemreap, Ben Kiernan summarizes four opinions. The Democratic Kampuchea radio immediately charged that it was an American F-111 aircraft. Steve Heder suspected that it was a Thai F-5 aircraft. John Macbeth thought of a Vietnamese MIG, but later he recognized that it could almost have been a Phnom Penh MIG.

Ben Kiernan seemed to lean toward the latter possibility. He based on the testimony of a company commander in the Siemreap area who fled to Thailand in 1977 and says that one day before the bombing, Pa Thol (alias Soth), Sector 109 (Siemreap) Secretary, held a meeting of “at least 30 local Communist cadres” and that during this meeting, all the combatants wanted to rebel so that they could return home and work as they had before the seizure of Phnom Penh ...” He even claimed that Koy Thuon had also attended that meeting. He [Ben Kiernan] posed the question, “Is it possible the Center learned of this meeting and intended to bomb this rebel group? Ben Kiernan believed that “this possibility is as great as any other.”<sup>177</sup> When we examine this and see that Soth and those with him still held their positions in Sector 106 for another full year, this indicates that the Center did not know anything about the matter. Only much later did they learn of it. So then, it was nine months later, on 15 January, when they decided to send Koy Thuon to S-21 and arrested those under his command like Soth and Srēng (who at the time was Deputy Secretary of the North Zone). As for Chakrei and Chhouk, no hesitation on the part of the Khmer Rouge leadership was seen as was seen in Koy Thuon’s case. The confessions of these two Division 170 military cadres may have fit a long-standing suspicion on the part of Pol Pot toward both those cadres and a number of other East Zone cadres as well. As for Chakrei, Pol Pot had not trusted him for quite some time. For example, at the 9 October 1975 meeting of the Standing Committee, he remarked that even though his [Koy Thuon’s] division was “strong” the political education of the combatants was “not very profound, and Chakrei himself was “new” and had his position because of “Vietnam.” We must monitor somewhat closely.”<sup>178</sup> It is my understanding that Pol Pot’s saying this in front of the Standing Committee was responsible speech, not words of hatred for Chakrei because of some matter. He was speaking as a Party Secretary who had been monitoring Chakrei for a very long time. As for Chhouk, he may have also been monitoring Chhouk for a long time.

The arrests of these two East Zone cadres led to an internal sweeping clean of a chain of persons, in particular former Issarak that had cooperated with the Viet Minh during the Nine-year War era (1945-1954), until two years later when Sao Phim shot

<sup>176</sup> I have based the events I describe in this passage on Philip Short’s book, pages 354 and 355

<sup>177</sup> Ben Kiernan, “The Pol Pot Regime” page 317

<sup>178</sup> Ben Kiernan, “The Pol Pot Regime” page 101

himself to death. Why did this sweeping clean first impact the cadres that were former Issarak that had cooperated with the Viet Minh during the Nine-year War? I will try to answer this later.

**Third, the way Pol Pot used documents that came from the use of torture.**

I am inclined to agree with David Short that Pol Pot was not so stupid as to believe documents that came from the use of torture.<sup>179</sup> But Philip Short seems to have over-spoken somewhat in saying that the role of (Prison) S-21 and the confessions it supplied was not to provide information, but was rather to provide the proof of “treason” that the leadership needed to arrest those they had already decided to arrest. According to what I understood, Pol Pot’s methodology on any issue was to gather maximum documentation for analysis before making a decision. He had even compiled a document entitled, “Leading and Working Following the 3-7-8 Principle of Analysis” for training combatants and cadres at every echelon.<sup>180</sup> He always personally implemented this principle. For example, when he was the hostage of the Vietnamese in 1963, it was by implementing this principle that he was able to monitor the situation and analyze and see the American plan to use Lon Nol or Son Ngoc Thanh to do something against Norodom Sihanouk. With this analysis, he called a meeting of the Center to take the decision to carry out combined armed-political struggle. It was this decision that Ben Kiernan called “the words of Pol Pot” that helped many cadres flee to the forests in a timely manner so that they could lead the combined armed-political struggle in the forests and so that they could lead the armed struggle that began in early 1968. Pol Pot was a leader who paid the utmost attention to monitoring cadres, in particular important cadres, to grasp their weak and strong points and educate and build them accurately so that he would know the good ones and the bad ones. Thus, following this pattern, we can conclude that in the matter of Chakrei and the other East Zone cadres that were implicated, he did not simply believe the documentation of responses that had been made under torture. The confessions were just one of many forms of documentation that he had monitored all along.

There are many specific examples that show that Pol Pot did not just make random arrests. Let me present several, as follows:

Even though Koy Thuon had been in custody since April 1976, even before Chakrei, Chhouk, and Ya, it was not until 15 January 1977, nine months later, that the Standing Committee sent him to S-21 for interrogation. This was because initially Pol Pot did not even suspect Koy Thuon, despite that fact that Koy Thuon was not very conscientious either at work or in terms of morals. The matter that led to his removal from his position of Zone Secretary was his loss of influence among the people in the base areas. But, he was still appointed Minister of Commerce. Later he was detained because he had killed a combatant named Long to cover his trail of immorality, that’s all. But Pol Pot placed more importance on the matter of Chakrei, Chhouk, and Ya, probably because he had been monitoring them for a long time and these issues were more serious.

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<sup>179</sup> Philip Short, “Pol Pot ...” page 358

<sup>180</sup> Please read Annex 3

Aside from the above-mentioned examples, there are other examples that show that Pol Pot did not just simply believe the confessions. For instance, the case of Mrs Moeun, the wife of Pech Cheang, the DK ambassador in Beijing. Confessions had implicated her eight times as being in Koy Thuon's network, but Pol Pot said, "If Moeun has become a traitor, all the rest are traitors too." As for Sao Phim, twelve confessions had implicated him<sup>181</sup>, including Ya's confession of 29 September 1976 saying that he [Phim] was [Ya's] superior but not overtly.<sup>182</sup> In these responses, Ya described in detail his relationship with those two persons. Ya said that he always seized the opportunity during official meetings like Conferences or the semi-annual Center meetings to visit the location where Sao Phim was resting (They arranged beds for the three senior members of the Standing Committee separate from the others.) to talk about their secret work. Ya said that he had begun doing that since the July 1971 Congress in the North Zone. Sometimes the two of them pretended to be talking about the content on the agenda to prevent against anyone closely hearing or listening, and they did not talk about anything other than work. According to this confession, Ya said that Sao Phim frequently warned him to concentrate on building minority cadres in the Northeast because this Zone was of great importance to the new Party. Ya said, "Brother Phim said little. He said that the Vietnam problem had no cut-off. It is a very long-term problem."

Later, in October 1975, during an ordinary meeting of the Center to push the decisive attack to liberate Phnom Penh, Ya said, "Brother Phim's opinion was:

If, in case one, we win before the Vietnamese, then the Vietnamese will be unable to enter Kampuchea. Our journey will be difficult and complicated.

If, in case two, the Vietnamese win first, Vietnam will enter Kampuchea like water through a broken dam, and they will be even stronger than they were after the 1970 coup. In this case, our journey will clearly be an easy one, because we will have the Vietnamese as our backstop."

Ya continued: "Assessment of the situation shows that case two is more probable, because all the reasons we have seen. Case two may be possible, but is less likely."

The question posed is: With confessions like these, why did Pol Pot not take immediate measures toward Sao Phim? Why did he leave Sao Phim free until May 1978, nearly two years later? Perhaps it was because Pol Pot had understood all along that even though Sao Phim showed a stance of relying upon Vietnam, Sao Phim still repeatedly respected his [Pol Pot's] reasoning. So then, he feared that Ya had intended to destroy the CPK, or else he thought that if immediate measures were taken directly against Sao Phim while leaving the East Zone leadership intact, one of Sao Phim's deputies might intervene and take the East Zone (and perhaps the Northeast and even the entire strip East of the Mekong River) straight over to Vietnam. So then, he used the methodology of cutting off

<sup>181</sup> Philip Short, "Pol Pot ..." page 358

<sup>182</sup> "The Confessions of Khmer Rouge Leaders", compiled by the Samleng Yuvachon Khmer Newspaper, pages 228-235

Sao Phim's arms and legs first, and then in early 1978 he turned to trying to arrest Sao Phim ...

Looking at this issue, no one is able to provide an answer. My objective is only my desire to show that on his part, Pol Pot was very cautious in using those confessions. However, this does not mean that all the arrests he made were correct.

**Fourth, the repeated interference of the Vietnamese communists in the internal affairs of the CPK.**

In 1973-1974 an American Department of State officer named Kenneth Quinn did research and found that the rebel movement was split between the extremists (the Khmer Rouge) and the “moderates that leaned toward Sihanouk and leaned toward Vietnam (the Khmer Rumdoh).”<sup>183</sup> Kenneth Quinn claimed that “In Prey Veng, the Khmer Rumdoh have control of the Cambodian communist movement.”

As for Philip Short, he provided clear evidence that in truth, it was the Vietnamese that created the Khmer Rumdoh Army [Khmer Liberation Army]. He wrote as follows: “In theory he (Sihanouk) led the Khmer Rumdoh that were different from the Khmer Rouge in that they wore Sihanouk badges on their uniforms. But in fact, the Vietnamese had created them, as Sihanouk bitterly noted that he had never seen a chain of command from the bottom up to the FUNK in Beijing. The Sihanoukist army received its orders from Hanoi instead.”<sup>184</sup> So then, Philip Short provided clear evidence that the Vietnamese had stuck their hands deeply into internal CPK affairs since 1973, the year that Kenneth Quinn discovered that “inside the rebel movement there is a split between the extremists (the Khmer Rouge) and the “moderates” leaning toward Sihanouk and leaning toward Vietnam (the Khmer Rumdoh).”

How long had the Vietnamese been sticking their hands in to interfere in the internal affairs of the CPK?

We already know that the Khmer Rouge leaders considered the peasant rebellion at Samlaut as having been begun too early in only a single location, where it could be easily smashed. The CPK looked for a way to put an end to the rebellion to pull back and make preparations to rise up again in struggle simultaneously throughout the country.

The time was set for early January 1968. The movement acted together fairly well, but the East did not join in with the others. Ben Kiernan wrote that “This was a sign of an internal split within the CPK. In the end, eight months later in August 1968, Sao Phim's East Zone joined in and opened fire.” He carried out only a little military activity. The CPK leadership had to contact him and persuade him “most skillfully” (the words of

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<sup>183</sup> Ben Kiernan, “The Pol Pot Regime” page 65

<sup>184</sup> Ben Kiernan, “The Pol Pot Regime” page 240 (The author's reference to Sihanouk's book entitled “War and Hope” printed in Paris, page 15)



Ben Kiernan) before the East Zone agreed to join in and open fire in ways mentioned above.<sup>185</sup>

We have already seen that Sao Phim and Vorn Vet thought a great deal about the strategy of armed struggle. But before long, they agreed since at that time “In general ... the military and security forces (of Lon Nol) could do anything independently from Sihanouk or with the unspoken support of Sihanouk, and every source agrees on this point, that campaigns of suppression have become the rule.”<sup>186</sup> So why, on the designated day, did Sao Phim change at the last moment? It is my understanding that on this question, we might reference the words of Ben Kiernan, who said, “He (Sao Phim) was different from the leadership in general in that he continued to have close contacts with the Vietnamese communists.” Whether he had intended to or not, Kiernan provided the answer to this question.<sup>187</sup>

In these close contacts, according to Ben Kiernan’s book, important East Zone cadres including Sao Phim still continued to shelter in Viet Cong bases areas inside South Vietnamese territory as they had during the struggle era.<sup>188</sup> Combining the information that Ben Kiernan discovered, Kenneth Quinn’s information on the Khmer Rouge and the Khmer Rumdoh, and the evidence that Philip Short stated about the Vietnamese having created the Khmer Rumdoh army leads us to fairly clearly see that what had led Sao Phim to fail to join in opening fire on the designated day was that had been influenced by the Vietnamese.

You all already know about the problems inside the Cambodian party regarding the birth of the Cambodian party that arose from two vastly different factions of the Party. One part, as we saw in Chapter 3, was the former Issarak that the Vietnamese had gathered up from here and there and put up to screen their activities in Cambodia during 1946-1954. The second faction was the intellectuals who had studied in France, teachers, students, and government officials. As we have already seen above, after 1954, after Vietnamese forces withdrew from Cambodia and went to Hanoi and after Siv Heng’s treason, the rural faction of the movement fell into a state of fear and comfort-loving passivism. It was the faction in the city that was able to keep the movement alive, and through this they took the helm to lead the movement.

However, during the armed struggle, the former Issarak like Ros Nhim, Kè Pok, Sao Phim, Mok, and Praseth directly led the on the spot fighting. The intellectuals only directly led the fighting in the Northeast.

Philip Short wrote: “Looking far into the future, Sar understood that it was necessary and unavoidable that both these factions must unite. However, unifying these

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<sup>185</sup> Ben Kiernan, “How Pol Pot Came to Power” page 250

<sup>186</sup> Ben Kiernan, “How Pol Pot Came to Power” page 231

<sup>187</sup> Ben Kiernan, “How Pol Pot Came to Power” page 250

<sup>188</sup> Ben Kiernan, “How Pol Pot Came to Power” page 282

two very different forces into one fused flesh inside one Party was difficult.” The author wrote: “During 1968 and 1969, the need to lead a “people’s war” against a vastly stronger enemy, the need to deal with the suppression campaign that was falling upon the city faction as well as the countryside, the belief that in the future the communist movement would transform into a strong movement, and the hope that the fruits of victory would be equally divided all created a foundation for unification. So then, this was the first time that a true national liberation movement appeared. But splicing these two tree branches still did not fuse them into one entity very well at all. The unavoidable but unnatural alliance continued due to the mental effort and “extreme skill” of Sar and his colleagues.<sup>189</sup> The question is: Why did this splicing of two branches of the Khmer Rouge movement did not fuse them very well at all? We can examine this and see that:

1. As Philip Short wrote: “Everything that happened in mid April 1975 was the result of policies that began back in the 1960 era and had even longer-term roots. (The author points to the era when the Viet Minh were active in Cambodia during 1946-1954.) There was nothing about this that was accidental. Six Zone chairmen – Ros Nhim and Kung Sophâl in the Northwest Zone, Pok in the North Zone, Nei Sarann in the Northeast Zone, Sao Phim in the East Zone, and Mok in the Southwest Zone – had begun their lives inside the struggle under the Issarak flag during the war against the French.

They all demonstrated their stubbornness and stupidity, seeing everything from just one angle, their cruelty and their disregard for human life, just as the Issarak had done 30 years earlier. In general in communist States, all decisions are made inside a central leadership framework, and the implementation of those decisions must be carried out the same by each individual. The Cambodia of the Khmer Rouge had discipline. ... They respected and obeyed the instructions of the Central Committee of the CPK, but each Zone acted according to their respective understanding ... and this fact applied to Zone level on down through the other levels ...”<sup>190</sup>

2. The Vietnamese continued to look after their influence over the Issarak by attacking the line of independence-sovereignty all along, to the point that they even refused to recognize 1960 as the year of the birth of the CPK. They still insisted on using 1951 as they year of the birth of the Kampuchean party, even though that party had been completely dissolved since 1954 when the Viet Cong forces withdrew from Kampuchea and returned to Vietnam.

3. Because of the clear interference of the Vietnamese that I have repeatedly described above, I wish take this opportunity to make an observation: The evidence Philip Short provided about the Vietnamese having created the Khmer Rumdoh movement, together with the evidence that other researchers have discovered, makes it clear that all of Pol Pot’s monitoring, following his 3-7-8 principle, of Chakrei, Chhouk, Ya, and the other cadres who had cooperated with the Viet Minh was correct. Thus, Philip Short was incorrect when he wrote “The role of Prison S-21 and the confessions

<sup>189</sup> Philip Short, “Pol Pot ...” page 179 (Note that Ben Kiernan used the words “extremely skilled” before, when he spoke about how the central leadership persuaded Sao Phim to join the armed struggle.)

<sup>190</sup> Philip Short, “Pol Pot ...” page 281

was not primarily to provide information, but rather to provide the “proof” of treason that they needed to arrest anyone they had already decided to arrest.” The policy of independence from Vietnam required the implementation of absolute policies inside the country, because without reliance upon Vietnam there was only reliance upon the peasants to turn to. So then, it was imperative to train and temper the peasants inside a difficult struggle, both a national struggle and a class struggle, with independence, mastery, and self-reliance without any fear whatsoever of labor. To the contrary, had there not been this reliance upon the peasants, becoming a foreign satellite would have been unavoidable. To Pol Pot, the national struggle was fused inseparably to the struggle of the peasants. However, building the forces of the peasants by relying on feudalist cadres was extremely difficult.

#### **Fifth, the revelations of a high-ranking Vietnamese soldier in 1973.**

In Ya’s “confession” he speaks of a high-level Vietnamese military officer who had accompanied Norodom Sihanouk from Hanoi when he visited the liberated zone in 1973, saying that this Vietnamese soldier had met with Ya and had proposed that Ya build a separate force.

Ya<sup>191</sup> provided the following account: “As for Brother (he was indicating me) if you need anything separately, make contact with my Zone (which was adjacent).” He knew that I was staying in the Northeast at the time. He asked if I had ever met Comrades Minh and Phang on their B-3 highlands. I said I had never met them. He said that if I had any business to go meet them and they help to the best of their capabilities. He was telling me to contact them and they would help me build a separate force. I said I did not yet need anything. He said it was just to prevent in advance, so that when the time came I could find them immediately and get help immediately.” Then Ya denied that he had accepted the offer of assistance from that high-level Vietnamese military officer. But Pol Pot had already seen the confessions of Chhouk and the various other confessions relating to Ya. Furthermore, this confession of Ya may have led him to think that this high-level Vietnamese military officer had from Hanoi to find Ya immediately and learn clearly of Ya’s duties. What they had said to Ya was spreading rumors about the VWP leadership’s instructions to the Kampuchean people’s party. Also Pol Pot may have thought that this may have been part of contact contacts between the VWP and the former Issarak from the “Nine-Year War” era through a number of core cadres like Ya by repeatedly secretly going over the heads of the CPK [leadership], at least since the Vietnamese learned that the CPK had stopped taking instructions from the VWP, meaning after the breaking out of the armed struggle in 1968. So then, the revelation of this high-level Vietnamese military officer was only confirmation that the Vietnamese had intended to eradicate him and liquidate the CPK since 1968. The Vietnamese blamed their difficulties during 1968-1970 when many for their forces were smashed on what they understood was Saloth Sar’s refusal to listen to them and making armed struggle causing Norodom Sihanouk to become surrounded by Lon Nol and the Americans. The truth, as we have seen above, was that Norodom Sihanouk had been surrounded by the

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<sup>191</sup> Ya’s confession dated 29 September 1976 “The Confessions of Khmer Rouge Leaders” compiled by the *Samleng Yuvachon* newspaper, pages 228-235

right-wing forces of Lon Nol since September 1966 when General Lon Nol was appointed Prime Minister by the Assembly that had been elected that year. But Lê Duân and the Vietnamese leadership did not understand the situation in Kampuchea and did not understand the necessary requirement to rise up in armed struggle of the Khmer Rouge in early 1968. However, if the Khmer Rouge had not carried out armed struggle with independence and mastery to counter the suppression campaigns of the Lon Nol army at the time of the coup, they would have been smashed like the Indonesian Communist Party, and there would have been no FUNK. As for the Vietnamese, they would have been attacked and bottled-up by the Americans and Lon Nol from both west and east of Kampuchea. Then it would have been very hard to project how the situation would have turned out.

Vietnam, in their large-country status, did not think of this eventuality. They only saw that Saloth Sar and the CPK refused to obey their orders and they considered him to be an unpleasing ally. Therefore, the Vietnamese did not need him and the CPK, but up until then they had been unable to do anything to him. This was the first confirmation.

His meetings with Lê Duân in late 1969 were a second confirmation.

**Sixth, in the confessions of Koy Thuon, alias Thuch, what was there that may have caught Pol Pot's attention?**

These responses were dated 4 March 1977.<sup>192</sup> As I understand it, in these responses there were three primary themes that may have caught Pol Pot's attention.

1. These confessions may have led Pol Pot to believe even more that his arresting Ya was not wrong, and Ya may have been an individual that played an important role in the new party that they were setting up.

2. But the issue that Pol Pot may have noticed most of all was related to the confessions of Koy Thuon, meaning Doeun of Office 870 having given to Ya secret information of the Standing Committee on the matter of Vy and Lăo, the secretary and deputy secretary in Ratanakiri. Aside from Doeun, no one had known this. Therefore, this led Pol Pot to understand that Doeun really had reported to his clique during a three-person meeting in late December 1975, and so then this was and Koy Thuon knew of it. Doeun had reported because Vy and Lăo were "responsible cadres in the Northeast Zone" of the new party. Doeun reported to Ya that "If Comrades Vy and Lăo are left to continue carrying out such activities, that would not be good, because I know that the Organization taking great notice to both comrades implementing wrongly and distorting lines. This is extremely clear. ... Since the beginning, the Organization concentrated greatly on solidarity with the minorities." Doeun added that: "If this issue is not sorted out quickly, it will certainly lead to damaging our forces." It was this matter that led Ya to invite Thuch to a meeting to discuss this in late December 1975. As for confessions of "Comrade Vy" and "Comrade Lăo," Ya admitted that "Comrade Vy and Comrade Lăo

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<sup>192</sup> "The Confessions of Khmer Rouge Leaders", compiled by the Samleng Yuvachon Khmer Newspaper, pages 106-115

and a number of other cadres had charged a number of subordinate cadres and some of the people were all “traitors” and there were plans to arrest them. Some were arrested and killed. Others fled with other brothers and sisters into Vietnamese territory and Lao territory, totaling tens and hundreds of families.” After the three met in late December 1975 on night in January 1976 Pol Pot invited all three for discussions. He wanted to transfer the two comrades to Agriculture and find new cadres to replace them. ... At the time, Pol Pot did not yet consider Vy and Lăo as having exaggerated the lines. He may have thought that the two of them were minorities who did not yet understand the lines.

3. In the closing section of Koy Thuon’s confession, he said that Ya had emphasized the importance of the Northeast Zone that had common boundaries with Laos and Vietnam, who were “our life-and-death friends who have promised to help us any time at all.” Pol Pot may have understood that Ya’s refusal to admit that he had accepted the proposal of the high-level Vietnamese military officer was untrue, and in fact, there may have been a relationship with the Vietnamese since at least 1973.

Furthermore, Pol Pot may have understood from Ya’s saying this that [Ya] had attracted intellectual cadres that had contradictions with his [Pol Pot’s] policies. Normally, those persons did not accept the leadership of cadres like Ya and the cadres that had emerged from the Viet Minh.

Let me make it clear that previously Doeun had been a young cadre who was the hope of Pol Pot, because Doeun was a child of the lower stratum but had enough education (he had studied at the Preah Sihanouk Lycee in Kampong Cham) to understand revolutionary theory more profoundly in the future and he also was very experienced in working in the base areas.<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> On this, I wish to make a parenthetical statement: There is some opinion that after Doeun’s arrest, I rose to become Office 870 Chairman to replace him. In fact, that is untrue. I do not know who the Standing Committee assigned to replace Doeun. As I have already said, secrecy was very firm at that time. Even inside the same unit, inside Office 870, there was still secrecy. I did not even want to know or hear about what Doeun did or where he went. All along, he was not at the Office very much. My wife was in charge of the kitchen and left food on the table for him. Very frequently he was not seen to come to eat. After a long time, we seemed to get used to this situation. Where Doeun went to and came from was not given any thought. So then, neither my wife nor I even knew he had been arrested. We thought even less about who they appointed in his place. When Doeun was gone, they used another cadre named Pàng (original name Chhim Sâm-aok), who had been Pol Pot’s most trusted cadre since the Office 100 period. Actually, when Doeun was present, Pàng already had the role of being his assistant. It should be emphasized that work such as Doeun’s required a cadre that was very close to the cadres in the base areas or the various other units and who knew everyone very deeply and frequently ate, slept, and visited with them, because this work required him to assist the Standing Committee in monitoring the various cadres who were under suspicion or to question the various cadres on some matter that the Standing Committee wanted followed-up. (I only learned afterwards about this work from research.) So then, I was a high-level intellectual who had never worked in the base areas and did not know the various base area cadres as well and deeply as Doeun and Pàng did. I am only taking this opportunity to explain, that’s all.

### **Seventh, why was the scale of the arrests and killing so large?**

As I understand it, there were many mutually-dependent reasons, with the new, immature state authorities confronting an extremely difficult situation:

1. It should be made clear that Pol Pot did not participate with the Standing Committee in the arrests of important cadres within the Party. He was extremely cautious on this issue because he understood how long it had taken and how arduous the path had been to build those cadres. Thus, the cadres that had to be arrested were few in number, probably not more than several hundred.

But each cadre that was arrested was responsible for holding power in the base areas or various echelons, and each had their own networks in the base areas according to Cambodian social traditions, meaning those who followed them because they wanted power or various benefits or were relatives or lived off them or sometimes had missions that required them to work with together. Philip Short clearly saw this issue when he wrote, "... Feudal relationships from superiors to subordinates were so deeply rooted in Kampuchean society that even the Khmer Rouge were not yet able to dig them out and uproot them."<sup>194</sup>

The reason that made it hard to dig them out and uproot them was the warlord nature of the six Zone Chairmen, as Philip Short has detailed. This situation was one obstacle that made it difficult to uproot the feudal society, but also it was their ignorance, their cruelty, and their taking human life lightly, "like the Issarak had done 30 years earlier." They were the sources of all the violations during the research of networks to see who had to be arrested at the initiative of the Zone Chairmen.

This is what led to the stupid arrests. Everyone was a traitor, even a hungry potato thief. A child or wife or husband or father- or mother-in-law stealing a handful of rice to eat was a traitor ... etc. This was the source of the slogan, "To keep them is no gain, to remove them is no loss", etc.

2. It is true that with the evacuation of the cities and the rapid expansion of high-level cooperatives, there was no time to assess, select, purge, educate, or train the cooperative chairmen. Not using currency and continuing to govern the country as it had been governed during war, in secret, with a strict screen with no one person daring to talk to another at all, all this gave tremendous power to these warlords.

But we cannot forget that before the liberation of Phnom Penh there were two urgent problems for the CPK and Pol Pot, both serious, both life-and-death for the nation:

First, the threat from Vietnamese greed and ambition to govern Cambodia. The danger of their activities to interfere in internal CPK matters as I have continually described above is clear to all of us.

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<sup>194</sup> Philip Short, "Pol Pot ..." page 320

Second, the danger of starvation in Phnom Penh and the provincial towns. This was a problem that had to be given urgent thought even before the liberation of the entire country.

Also, we must not forget that the war that had ravaged the country for five years was a war of destruction. A large part of the countryside had been smashed to bits by bombing. For example, surrounding Phnom Penh and the provincial towns on both sides of the lower Mekong River to the Vietnamese border, the geography was filled with B-52 bomb craters and there were still many unexploded bombs too. So then, the land in those areas had been abandoned. Rice could not be grown in contested areas because of long-term back-and-forth fighting to seize those locations. In many other locations in the rear of the contested areas sometimes the rice that had been grown was damaged because of enemy raids to destroy rice at full bloom. So then, in the countryside there was a shortage of food. Furthermore, the troops had to be fed too so that they would have the strength to fight. Because the cooperatives distributed food, there was no starvation; however, the people in general did not get to eat their fill. Moreover, in general the people, including my family as well, ate manioc or bananas mixed with a few grains of rice. In Phnom Penh, there had been a danger of starvation since before 17 April 1975. This is what led Shawcross to write:

“In April 1975, any government would have had to face almost unsolvable food and agricultural issues ...” A report by American foreign aid authorities stated, “To avoid starvation, Cambodia must smelt their swords to make plowshares, something there is not much hope they want to do ... So then, without food aid from the outside, famine will spread throughout the country beginning in February ... This year, it is unavoidable that half the population will have to work like slaves with little food to eat (and those who supported the Khmer Republic of Lon Nol might have even more difficulties.) The difficulties and starvation will continue for two or three more years.”<sup>195</sup>

As for the situation in Phnom Penh, which would soon fall under the responsibility of the Khmer Rouge, he wrote the following:

“Reports of various aid agencies and investigations of the World Health Organization and the UNHCR and the Senate showed that food shortages have been a serious problem since 1974. The general auditor of foreign aid of the State Department emphasized that children were starving in Cambodia ... The reports recognized that: “They are encountering emaciated children, just skin and bones, in the arms of emaciated mothers alone on the curbs and being ignored, just waiting to die ...”<sup>196</sup>

Based on this same World Health Organization Report, Hildebran and Porter showed that five months before the end of the war, 15,000 people died from starvation, the majority of whom were refugees from the countryside.<sup>197</sup> Furthermore, a Khmer

<sup>195</sup> William Shawcross, “The Suffering that No One Thought About” page 351

<sup>196</sup> William Shawcross, “The Suffering that No One Thought About” page 351

<sup>197</sup> Philip Short, “Pol Pot ...” page 216

Republic Information Circular dated 29 March 1975 published that every single day hundreds died of starvation.

Philip Short wrote the following:

“Hundreds and thousands of villagers fled to the provincial towns, where they lived in great hardship on the edge of starvation. The population of Phnom Penh, only 650,000 at the time of the coup, exceeded a million at the end of the year and would reach 2.5 million by 1975. (Shawcross said three million.) The provincial towns that were still in the hands of the government, for instance Battambang, Kampong Speu, and Siemreap, were swelled to the bursting point.”<sup>198</sup>

Michael Vickery presented the same situation. He excerpted an article in the British magazine *The Sunday Times Magazine* that “Even in Phnom Penh now, 50 infants die each week because of lack of food and unknown numbers of other children because of starvation.”

As for himself personally, he wrote the following:

“In 1974 in Phnom Penh, the rice supply was approximately one-third of what was required. After September of that year, the average head of family could not buy enough (rice) to meet needs, and it is not clear it was even there to be sold. In February 1975, each family was permitted to buy 2.75 kilograms per person per ten days at a price that the State helped support. This was 250 grams per day, a little more than one can. But we must not forget the corruption of the Lon Nol regime and the frequent misdirection of food supplies that prevented the possibility of buying the maximum amount permitted by the State. Only the rich had enough to eat ... In March 1975, 8,000 died of starvation. A Westerner who collected statistics on this said: “The children of this generation will become a lost generation.” Vickery’s final conclusion was that there was much truth in Democratic Kampuchea claims that only an evacuation could save the people of the city from the danger of serious starvation ...<sup>199</sup>

In summary, in 1975 the food supply problem throughout the country was as follows: For a long time already, in the countryside a large part of the land had been abandoned and no rice could be grown. Three million people, in general, did not have enough to eat. In the city, three million other people were gradually starving. This is why Pol Pot said, “Continuing to stay in the city will lead to danger of famine. So then, evacuating the city is better, in order to avoid the danger of famine and the danger of rebellion.”<sup>200</sup> If there was a rebellion, the Vietnam clearly would have come to intervene. But, not seeing rebellion, the Vietnamese instead presented their 1976 ultimatum.

<sup>198</sup> Philip Short, “Pol Pot ...” page 216

<sup>199</sup> Michael Vickery “Cambodia 1975-1982”, pages 54 and 85

<sup>200</sup> His interview with Nate Thayer, 1988



3. Evacuating the cities seemed to be the only measure that the situation at the time required; it seemed unavoidable. Not using currency, the expansion of “high-level cooperatives” throughout the country, governing the country in strict discipline like it had been led during wartime, all of this truly came from the extremist ideology of Pol Pot.

“High-level cooperatives” were organized in 1973, which was a time during which society in the Kampuchean countryside had been scattered and smashed to bits by B-52 carpet bombing. The land was declared to belong to the cooperatives. The yearly harvest was declared to be under the common ownership of the cooperatives and ceased to be distributed to houses as it had been previously. Each person received a designated rice ration. In a situation of the country having been smashed to bits by war, a large part of the rice fields had been abandoned and were not being worked, so only by doing this could the people have enough food to stay alive and could the troops be fed so that they could fight and win the war. Even so, there were still opposition movements. In the initial period, these movements took the form of killing cattle and water buffaloes to get meat to distribute to eat by avoiding placing the meat under the common ownership of the cooperatives. Later on, it took the form of stealing rice and paddy from common storehouses to increase the rations of themselves and their families at home. But in comparison, the people in general still endured the hardships, accepted these high-level cooperatives, and did whatever it took to liberate the country and reestablish peace. But, when the war ended, the people in general did not see any reason to maintain this strict organization any longer. A return to the form of the cooperatives that had been organized during 1971-1972 with the annual harvest being distributed according to the area of land of each person in the cooperatives would probably have better met the requirements of the people. Distributing the harvest according to the area of land of each member would have not created very much of a difference, because each person had approximately the same amount of ground after 1970-1971 when the leadership required those people who had a lot of land to divide it up among the peasants who lacked land. If money were still in use, this would have opened up the right for each person, especially the brothers and sisters who were evacuees who had gold or jewelry on them, to use it to buy the various items that they needed. Along with this, using the intellectuals who would have tried to work in their areas of expertise and demonstrate that they accepted the line of the Party would have demonstrated to everyone that the new State authorities did not have the goal of eradicating them, and to the contrary, the new State authorities wanted to build them along the pattern of the clean and correct national traditions of our peasants.

Philip Short was correct when he wrote: “Pol Pot did not intend to reduce the population. To the contrary, his aim was to increase the population by a factor of two or three. Specifically, he wanted the population of Kampuchea to rise to “15 to 20 million within ten years,” the number that was required to accomplish the various plans that would bring strength and prosperity to the country. But how was this goal to be accomplished if the women’s menstrual periods stopped due to hunger? The leadership saw this problem. The decisions of the Standing Committee at that time and Pol Pot’s speeches during narrow meetings of the Party many times talked a lot about the necessity of sorting out an appropriate amount of food, meaning an average of 500 grams per person per day. “In one conference in the West Zone, he [Pol Pot] emphasized that the

most important medicine was food. Resolving the food supply is key.” Two months later, he talked about this again:

“We must sort out the livelihood of the people and sort it out quickly ... (If not,) there will be contradictions between us and them.”<sup>201</sup> The author spoke about the minutes of a meeting of the Standing Committee as follows: “The paddy ration must be two cans per day. Otherwise, the health of the people and their working strength will go down.”<sup>202</sup> The author noted that since these documents, especially minutes of the Standing Committee, were disseminated to less than ten persons and were top secret and not for wide dissemination, it is credible that the thoughts raised by Pol Pot in those documents were honest.

However, Philip Short saw the contradiction within the policies of Pol Pot “when, in a time of general shortages, he instructed cadres to arrange at least an appropriate amount of food for everyone, but he still stuck to [a policy of] different rations for the “new people” and the “old people.” In other words, it was imperative to both guarantee that a number of responsible persons living separately from the masses ... and groups with “special rights” had a better-than-normal diet ... and also to maintain a state of hunger as a form of discipline...”<sup>203</sup> However, as for me personally, I never saw any instructions at all setting different rations for the new people and the old people. If there actually were instructions like this, they would have been discussed inside the Party Center. In saying this, I am not denying that there were not any responsible cadres living separately from the masses or not any groups with “special rights.” All six Zone Chairman were warlords, so the existence of cadres or groups with special rights would not be at all strange. However, it is my understanding that it was imperative to arrange “appropriate rations,” for the troops for example, not primarily for reasons of loyalty to the regime, but so that the troops could fulfill their mission of defending the country. As for some units, for instance as Philip Short mentioned, the railway or units in the factories in Phnom Penh (or the many other units that worked along the riverside), there may have been times of plenty, for instance November and December when there were lots of fish.

#### 4. Why did they distinguish between the “new people” and the “old people”?

Since the beginning, the Party, the Army, and the State authority at various echelons stood upon the foundation of class and had to have come from the “mass movement, meaning they all had to have demonstrated their life-and-death fight to defend the Party, defend the Army, and defend the state authority. The implementation of this principle may have been relaxed a bit inside the lower frameworks of power, but they never abandoned this principle at all. Since the evacuees had never even known the Party, the Army, or the revolutionary state authority, they had no possibilities at all of joining the State authority, even at low levels such as village or cooperative or working as

<sup>201</sup> Philip Short, “Pol Pot ...” page 321

<sup>202</sup> Minutes of a 1976 meeting of the Standing Committee of the CPK

<sup>203</sup> Philip Short, “Pol Pot ...” page 321

combatants in the Army. This was the principle of vigilance to prevent enemy agents some countries from being able to bore holes from within the Kampuchean revolutionary state authorities. So then, it was imperative to grasp the history of each person, and to make it easy for cadres and the peasants to grasp the history of each person, the easiest thing to do was to differentiate them into old people and new people.

However, Pol Pot himself always reminded all cadres not to consider all of the new people as enemies (or prisoners of war) without giving thought to the stances, views, and principles of the Party.<sup>204</sup> But in actuality, in many locations the “new people” were still considered to be prisoners of war, for example during the very first days of the evacuations. So then, the majority of the brothers and sisters who were evacuated understood that this regime intended to kill them all and keep the “old people” as the only remaining class in the country. But in truth, the Khmer Rouge never had that intention at all. The events that happened during the three years of Democratic Kampuchea came from “the relationship between the state authority and the Khmer Rouge that continued to behave according to their networks, among them the Zone Secretaries, the new-era feudalists who played the roles of warlords in the provinces and were loyal to the central leadership of the CPK, but who still had their own broad, personal powers.”<sup>205</sup> Let me remind you of Vietnam using the unit of Chăn Chakrei to disguise themselves as “Khmer Rumdoh” troops. We may then be able to understand who broad the meaning the words “who still had their own broad, personal powers to act as they saw fit” really was.

5. So why did they force the people to work to the point of exhaustion following the slogan, “Go on the offensive. Go on the offensive to wage socialist revolution and build socialism.”?

This came from Pol Pot saying, “Run fast. Run fast to sort out the food and agricultural crises” that Shawcross and the foreign aid reports talked about and that we summarized above. In order to run fast, Pol Pot understood that the organization of high-level cooperatives throughout the country would make the revolution in Kampuchea advance “30 years faster than the Chinese and (North) Korean and Vietnamese revolutions” because it would open broad possibilities by building dams and digging feeder canals to irrigate the countryside throughout country and open up a broad view so that Kampuchean agriculture could escape from backward agriculture and move toward modern agriculture. So then, our country would gradually have a firm foundation to modify the livelihood of the Kampuchean people and in steps Kampuchea would transform into an industrial country. It was in this spirit that Pol Pot informed his colleagues, “Gradually, the masses will move closer to the Party.”<sup>206</sup> Philip Short recognized that Pol Pot’s saying this was not propaganda. “Pol Pot honestly believed that he was striving for the interests of everyone and that sooner or later everyone would understand. His desire for power was a desire to control everything in the lives of the people to move toward a huge goal that he alone held the key to. That is clear. However,

<sup>204</sup> Philip Short, “Pol Pot ...” page 292 (the author’s reference to the document “Pol Pot: A Report” page 207)

<sup>205</sup> Philip Short, “Pol Pot ...” page 320

<sup>206</sup> Philip Short, “Pol Pot ...” page 292

his goal was not to force the people, but to persuade the people and make them understand “the necessity of trying to work.” But his compatriots did not understand him.”<sup>207</sup> It was my understanding that the task of having to explain the necessity of the work belonged to none other than the six Zone Chairmen, because they were personally on site. However, in accordance with their essential warlord nature, they were not close to the people and they were unable to strive to patiently explain to the people, especially the brother and sister evacuees; they just scolded and threatened them, that’s all.

The Vietnamese party since the day the CPK was founded, in particular the VWP’s sticking its hands deep inside to stir up the Kampuchean Party and Arm, made Pol Pot firmly believe that it was unavoidable that Kampuchea had to ready itself to eventually face and counter the threat from Hanoi. As he announced before the Standing Committee: “We must try to run fast to keep the Vietnamese from chasing us down.”<sup>208</sup>

6. Regardless, the efforts to keep running non-stop to “wage socialist revolution and build socialism” were carried out in a state of great turmoil. Depriving the people of rice in order to transport rice to the State to meet quotas led to a great loss of life. In this, another question that arise is: Was the Vietnamese sticking of their hands deep inside to stir up the CPK that appeared clearly in 1973 over, or not, during 1975-1978? Regardless, the turmoil at that time was an important factor that led many good cadres who had in the past been loyal to the cause and had been active in combat to turn to retreat instead. We should understand their hesitance facing this situation. But the many attempts of the Vietnamese communist leaders and their ultimatum in May 1976 made Pol Pot and the CPK leadership reach the conclusion that “smashing the internal latch-bars [door-keepers] of the Vietnamese is the only way to keep Kampuchea alive.”

In a word, the issue was massively complicated. They could not make a conclusion in just a word or two.

After 1979, the Khmer Rouge leadership always talked about the cadres that had emerged from the “Nine-Year War” implementing policies of “scorching it and pulling it out uncooked” in arresting and killing people, as we saw with Comrades Vy and Lao, who had distorted the Party line and starved the people to make them hate the DK and isolate the DK from the nation and the people to make it easy for the Vietnamese to commit aggression. This issue should be researched: firstly, in connection with depriving the people in order to send rice to the State and the State still not having rice to export overseas; and secondly, in connection to the situation that Philip Short wrote about, the six Zone Chairmen and the feudal-like relationships between leaders and subordinates that was deeply rooted in Kampuchean society.

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<sup>207</sup> Philip Short, “Pol Pot ...” page 292 (the author’s reference to the document “Pol Pot: A Report” page 207)

<sup>208</sup> Philip Short, “Pol Pot ...” page 292

### **Eighth, why did Pol Pot believe so strongly in Ta Mok?**

Probably this came from:

**A.** The movement did not have the time to gather up armed forces and organize them as a single, united army throughout the country. The army was in the hands of the Zones and Sectors. The central state authorities had no troops in their own hands. In truth, during the five years of war it was very difficult to accomplish this work. So then, Pol Pot had to rely upon Ta Mok whenever he encountered opposition or whenever he saw deviation from the common line that refused to rectify itself.

**B.** Also, as we have seen above, it was because Ta Mok appeared to Pol Pot to be a leader who had emerged from the peasantry. He was different from the other cadres that had emerged from the Nine-Year War. He did not drink liquor. He had no women. He lived most commonly. He held a very clear stance of independence, and he did not rely upon the Vietnamese forces that were deployed in Kampuchea at that time. His feats of arms were numerous, from the very first day when he opened fire during 1968-1968 and repeatedly throughout the war from 1970-1975. In truth, there was much about him to be both respected and feared. He was a symbol of high patriotic spirit, and he was vicious in the Issarak style. For example, he hated and was displeased with Sao Phim and other East Zone cadres. He did not understand the line of broadly gathering forces to attack and hit right at the most vicious enemies of all. He did not understand the line of struggling for solidarity and being in solidarity to struggle. It could be said that inside him, as inside the peasant cadres in general, when he held power or held a gun, in general whether to greater or lesser extent, his thinking was feudalist. But Pol Pot believed that we as humans were always developing. The issue was helping Ta Mok develop in an ever better direction. Thus, every time that he spoke about Ta Mok, Pol Pot never failed to speak of Mok's strong points: his experience and his being actively combative. But he never forgot to indoctrinate Mok further in revolutionary theory to push Ta Mok and the other peasant cadres to strive to build themselves and make forward progress. Pol Pot used what he called firm internal struggle, patiently striving without fail inside the movement of criticism and self-criticism.

## **A number of events that researchers misunderstand or do not talk about**

### **1. Things researchers misunderstand**

#### **A. The victims created the war, and the creators of war became the victims.**

In the beginning section when I spoke about the minutes of the 14 May 1976 meeting of the CPK Standing Committee, I noted that Ben Kiernan understood that to Pol Pot, the negotiations were not actually aimed at resolving the issue, but instead at “resolving the issue of education.” He added that the lesson was that “negotiations with Vietnam were impossible ...” This is a summary of the view of Ben Kiernan towards the 14 May 1976 minutes of the CPK Standing Committee. Thus, to Ben Kiernan this document is evidence of Pol Pot’s policy of instigating war.

This is a clear example of a misunderstanding. Not just a misunderstanding but understanding exactly the opposite of the truth.

To him, these minutes show that Pol Pot was getting ready for war with Vietnam. The victims became the instigators of the war. As for the instigators of the war, they became the victims.

In truth, these minutes clearly demonstrate that:

First, the entire Standing Committee was present at the meeting and they were very worried because they knew that Vietnam clearly would not pull back their demands, since they claimed they were a big country. Thus, everyone saw a dark future and saw constant tension and fighting along the border. So then, each of them thought of finding a way to avoid tensions and prevent troubles along the border. They agreed to accept the present unclear border rather than arguing about it back-and-forth.

Second, Pol Pot, before speaking about the long term future, said that he had nothing to add to what the others had already said, meaning that he agreed with their worries and thoughts. Then he said: “There are chronic contradictions with Vietnam” and he continued: “Now and in the future, there will always be constant troubles. We must strengthen our stances ... in the future, and hold this experience close. Then we will be able to negotiate with anyone. So then, this is a major lesson ...” I have already parsed the meaning of his words. His words were aimed at that cadres that had emerged from the Nine-Year war, Sao Phim among them, but indirectly so, without naming them. However, it was very clear that they should no longer foster hopes based upon the Vietnamese. And he was asking that they end their relationships with Vietnam. By Pol Pot saying “This is a major lesson,” he meant to say: Does everyone see whether or not the Vietnamese are thinking of the interests of our nation? Are they thinking of the

mutual interests of everyone, or are they thinking of profiting off us at every step?" This was an appeal for all of them to see this issue clearly and turn instead to strengthening and expanding solidarity and unity within the Party on the foundation of the CPK's stance independence and mastery. Shortly before this, he had already warned them indirectly by speaking of other countries that had been similarly threatened (Russia during 1920-1921) and Albania ... saying, "Attacking from the outside is not easy ... except when there are sufficient forces inside to support the external aggression." He added, "The most important thing is to smash internal opposition forces." Sao Phim did not attend that meeting. All along, except for major meetings such as meetings of the Center or conferences, he did not attend meetings very often, claiming that he was ill. At that time, I heard the words of Pol Pot, but I did not know that there were internal contradictions to this extent. At the time, it was my understanding that no Cambodian supported Vietnam on that ultimatum or on the Indochina Federation in general. So then, I was not worried about internal matters. I was worried about the fighting along the border, and I did not have a complete understanding of the ultimatum.

As for other researchers, no one paid any attention to this document at all. Therefore, no one saw the May 1976 Vietnamese ultimatum, and no one saw the decision of the CPK Standing Committee as an effort to maintain the present borders and avoid any tensions with Vietnam. Instead, they understood that the Khmer Rouge leadership was drunk with victory and was holding to a policy of instigating trouble with Vietnam, a much stronger country, not seeing their own size, to counter the dangers of Vietnamese ambition in the immediate term, just as a pretext to cover their own extremist ideology and policies to make trouble with their neighbor. Some authors were confused, thinking that the Khmer Rouge leadership's striking Vietnamese villages along the border was a manifestation of an ignorant policy "of attempting to seize back Kampuchea Kraom." However, the minutes of the CPK Standing Committee meeting on 14 May 1976 clearly demonstrate that each member of the meeting had no objective at all other than maintaining the present borders and that they were worried that they could not maintain even that and feared that the Vietnamese would strike along the border to cause tensions. These minutes were an internal document that was not for dissemination; thus, it is very valuable and fully credible regarding the precise words of the Khmer Rouge leaders in the document.

### **B. Pol Pot joined with Ta Mok and Ke Pok to oppose Sao Phim?**

Many researchers have written that inside the framework of his efforts to oppose Vietnam, Pol Pot joined with Ta Mok and Ke Pok to oppose Sao Phim. Such an understanding is another major mistake. Pol Pot could not have played such a clique game. This game, without fail, would have endangered the CPK and the entire country, especially during a time of war. Up until 1975 he [Sao Phim] was a symbol of respect for the CPK line.

We have seen that the CPK emerged from two forces that had different origins inside Cambodian society. Melding these two different forces into one organism inside one Party was extremely difficult thing that Pol Pot tried hard to achieve. The initial

effort was to overcome in preparing the lines and statutes of a Cambodian party independent from Vietnam. After that, he had to firmly lead the forces of the two parts of the party “extremely skillfully” based on these lines and statutes to create the preconditions for both groups to be in solidarity.

After the March 1970 coup, Vietnamese communist forces marched into Cambodia without even thinking about the opinion of the Khmer Rouge. They attacked a number of Lon Nol’s provincial towns on 20-21 March 1970, even before the broadcast of Norodom Sihanouk’s appeal on 23 March. From then on, the Khmer Rouge were even more worried about the danger of the Vietnamese communists seizing the opportunity to make a coup to regain the control over the Cambodian struggle that they had held during the Viet Minh era. From then on, these worries were constantly in the thoughts, the political lines, and the various decisions of the CPK.

Back when he met Lê Duân in Hanoi, Saloth Sar told him that the Cambodians wanted weapons but did not need troops: he said that the Cambodians would build their own armed forces, and this was better than relying upon Vietnam. But when he returned to the country, Vietnamese communist forces had already penetrated deeply inside the country. Facing this situation, he had to learn the details in each of the Zones. This is why in late September 1970 after listening to the overall situation and resolving some general issues in the Northeast, he urgently invited any cadres that could come to come to the Stung Chinit area on the Kampong Thom - Kampong Cham border. He was travelling from Ratanakiri to find a place to deploy there that would facilitate contacting and leading and that would be better than the Northeast. There is no documentation to clearly show who attended. Then three days later, Pol Pot declared that even though it was a meeting of the Standing Committee, at the time only he, Nuon Chea, and Sao Phim attended. Researchers disagree on the names of the three attendees at that meeting. Some think that perhaps Koy Thuon attended. This is plausible, because Koy Thuon owned that Zone. But at the time, Koy Thuon was not yet a member of the Standing Committee. Personally, I lean toward believing it was Sao Phim, because the East Zone was the closest to Vietnam and had already had this experience once in 1968. After agreeing, they selected 1 January as the date to open fire. On the designated day, suddenly the East was not seen to join in with the others. Seeing that the East was the most difficult place to counter Vietnamese influence, after the coup Pol Pot wanted to learn the situation in the East before the other Zones. Pol Pot probably declared that it had been a meeting of the Standing Committee in order to highlight the importance of the decisions that were made there. There was a reminder of the stance of independence and mastery that had emerged from the lesson of the 1954 Geneva Agreements, a stance that became a CPK slogan during the following nine years:

“We absolutely must not permit any other State to decide the destiny of our nation, our people, and our revolution. Now (those States) still maintain their former intentions ... We must not allow this historic mistake to reoccur. Aid from the outside, no matter how good it may be and no matter if it is unconditional ... cannot be the decisive factor ... We must constantly and firmly take a stance of independence, mastery, and self-reliance, and tolerate the suffering and hardships. On this foundation, what aid we accept



and what aid we do not accept depends on our understanding of whether or not it is of benefit to us and the ways that they use this aid.”<sup>209</sup>

It was based on this decision that the Northeast refused even military schools for various military and technical training.

The situation in the East at that time was in fact just as Pol Pot had worried. Sao Phim could not resist the Vietnamese pressure. On this issue, Tea Sâmbun, an East Zone cadre, gave the following account:

“In 1970 the Vietnamese Communists entered Kampuchea to attack Lon Nol and they liberated a broad stretch of territory. In the very beginning, they asked Sao Phim; initially we did not agree, because it was our country. We only requested weapons from them. However, they said that if we were to refuse, this would endanger their country. Regardless, they were coming. They added that without their help, we would not be able to liberate our country.”

In truth, the situation was that the Vietnamese were being chased from their rear by the Americans; regardless, Kampuchea was unable to impede them. But, when we could not resist, and if the Cambodians still maintained their independence according to the lesson we had all studied, the 1954 Geneva Agreements, if we had waited to discuss this and come to agreement inside the Cambodian party first, this probably would have led to complications later. Otherwise, Sao Phim would have decided unilaterally. On this situation, Tea Sâmbun gave the following account:

“From then on, we became friends who respected one another. We went everywhere together. We received guns that they had seized, and we gave them to our soldiers. We expanded to regimental level.”

I learned of the above matters by reading Ben Kiernan’s book.<sup>210</sup>

Later on, the Vietnamese opened military schools, medical schools, government administration schools, and radio communication schools to build the Zone cadres. Sao Phim probably thought that even though it was correct that we had been unable to agree to Joint Commands, when we could not stop them from entering the country there was no reason to impede the Vietnamese from helping to build cadres technically.

### **C. So then, the contradictions between these two lines were very profound.**

As for Sao Phim, he may have understood that his various organizations profited from his accommodating Vietnamese communist pressure even more than in 1969.

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<sup>209</sup> Philip Short, “Pol Pot ...” page 213

<sup>210</sup> Ben Kiernan, “How Pol Pot Came to Power” page 311

But as for Pol Pot, he saw that accommodation with the Vietnamese was, for one thing, contrary to the Party's decisions all along: for instance, the decision after studying and drawing experience from the 1954 Geneva Agreements, and another thing, it would lead without fail to long-term consequences. At various locations throughout the county, the Vietnamese organized troops and village and subdistrict state authorities. However, they did this without the responsible cadres on-site even knowing about it. So then, the CPK was able to pull those organizations back and dissolve and abandon them. In the East Zone in 1971 before those schools were closed, some cadres of the military and other fields had already appeared to serve that work. The CPK was unable to dissolve or drive them out like they had at other locations. Regardless, Pol Pot did not make any special alliance to oppose Sao Phim. A single misstep from his side would have led to a war to split up territory. What he could do was to have the leadership groups, including Sao Phim, try to educate those cadres to absorb the CPK line of independence and mastery, that's all. As to what extent they were able or unable to educate them, that was a different story. I saw that Pol Pot concentrated greatly on attracting Sao Phim and on showing his respect for him to the greatest extent possible. When I left for Europe or New York, he [Pol Pot] instructed me to buy medicine to treat the skin disease and itching that covered his body and bothered him greatly. Each trip I bought cases of hydrocortisone for him, but I did not know about Pol Pot's worries until the day that I read his comments on 9 October 1975 on Chăn Chakrei in Ben Kiernan's book. According to what I understand, at the time Pol Pot wanted to express his long-held concerns not just about Chăn Chakrei's troops but about the East Zone troops in general. The political education of the combatants was not profound because they were close to Vietnam. However, they looked down on their comrades in arms in the other Zones by calling them black cormorants, and they cooperated with the Vietnamese by disguising themselves as Khmer Rumdoh troops to attack fellow Cambodians, to attack their own Party. During the war, Pol Pot had been unable to mention this because he had to avoid spreading conflict. However, he saw that all this looking down on one's fellow troops and Cambodians fighting Cambodians had arisen because of from foreigners and had led to the creation of internal contradictions inside the Party, the Army, and in particular between three adjacent Zones, the East Zone, the Southwest Zone, and the North Zone.

According to what I know, Ben Kiernan is the author who has written in the most about the contradictions between the three Zones.

On the relationship between the North Zone and the East Zone, he relies upon the account of Mon, a soldier that the Vietnamese had recruited from the very first day they entered Kampuchea and who was later an interpreter for the Vietnamese in their contacts with the Cambodian communists at Baray (Kampong Thom Province). Mon said that on that side of the Mekong River (the North Zone) the Cambodian communists did not permit colored clothing. On the other side, they did. The other side wanted to know why they did not respect the Organization's rules, and they shot people who came over from the other side. The people on opposite sides of the river hated one another very intensely.<sup>211</sup>

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<sup>211</sup> Ben Kiernan, "How Pol Pot Came to Power" page 331

To provide an example of the beginning of the troubles between the Southwest and the East, the same author interviewed a dignitary who during 1973 was commander of East Zone Regiment 126. When this unit was tied up driving away Lon Nol troops, they crossed the Mekong River and entered Vorn Vet's Special Zone. The other side was Ta Mok's Southwest Zone. This dignitary stated, "When some of my troops ascended Phnom Chisau (on the Southwest's border with Zone 25) to find traditional medicines to treat combatants with malaria, the Southwest group captured twelve of them and took them far away and killed them." This dignitary said that he sent representatives to meet Ta Mok and informed his superiors. He also wrote to Ta Mok asking for the release of those combatants, but Ta Mok refused, saying he did not know about it. This dignitary added, "Sector 25 Secretary Chey (original name Norn Suon) worked with my group and there were no problems, but Mok and Chey did not get along very well."

The author summarized Kenneth Quinn, who relied upon other sources who were able to talk about this matter. Kenneth Quinn said, "In November 1973, the Khmer Rouge captured three Khmer Rumdoh cadres near Âng Baurei and took them away. They were never seen to return. They were probably taken away and killed. The next day, Khmer Rouge cadres came from Sector 25 (Kandal Province) along with Khmer Rumdoh from Sector 24 (Prey Veng). The Khmer Rouge asked the Khmer Rumdoh to stop cooperating with the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese inside Sector 24. The Khmer Rumdoh refused. The discussion became tense and there was fighting. The Khmer Rumdoh had nearby Viet Cong and North Vietnamese forces come to support them, and they killed 42 Khmer Rouge and drove back the remainder. From then on, the Khmer Rouge and the Khmer Rumdoh each constantly crossed the river into the other's territory to attack one another."<sup>212</sup>

In 1980, the author interviewed former member of Special Zone Regiment 11. This cadre said that his unit was also deployed in that vicinity and had had trouble with the East Zones army. "They wore dark greenish-brown horse-manure colored uniforms, not black like those we wore. Their hats were different than ours and they called us black cormorants. They shot at us when we rode in boats along the river, and from then on there was day-and-night gunfire. This soldier said that this fighting continued until the war ended in April 1975."<sup>213</sup>

Please recall regarding the "Khmer Rumdoh" that is was Chăn Chakrei troops that the Vietnamese use to disguise themselves as Sihanouk and Vietnamese side troops. The intent of this extremely dirty trick was to deceive Sihanouk and split the forces of the national struggle and stab the forces of the national struggle in the back to prevent Phnom Penh being liberated before Prey Nokor. Let me connect this dirty trick to the words of Lê Duân when he was negotiating with Saloth Sar during 1965:

"After Vietnam has received its freedom, the freedom of Kampuchea will come automatically" and with the words of Vietnamese cadres at every other echelon who kept running their mouths so boringly.

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<sup>212</sup> Ben Kiernan, "The Pol Pot Regime" page 65

<sup>213</sup> Ben Kiernan, "The Pol Pot Regime" page 65

So then, we understand who Saloth Sar strove to sort things out and find an accommodation between the Southwest and the East, but was unable to do so.

This situation was extremely serious. At a time of war with Lon Nol and the United States, these internal contradictions might at any time transform into a war to split up territory. As the supreme leader, Pol Pot could not take the side of the East that was so heavily influenced by Vietnam. But neither was he capable of playing clique games to push Ta Mok or Kè Pok to oppose or fire at the East Zone army. Internal contradictions are not resolved with weapons. All along, the influence of his leadership had dominated the Party and had made for monolithic solidarity and the successful overcoming of major obstacles from one to the next until then. This is because he absolutely stood upon the lines and statutes of the Party and tried to rectify all cadres, in particular important cadres, to hold the line above all else.

This is why it is my understanding that on this point, what Philip Short wrote is correct. It was due to Pol Pot's efforts to lead a true national revolutionary movement that the armed struggle of 1968-1969 arose. But the splicing these two branches still had not resulted in them becoming one organism at all. An alliance that was unavoidable but unnatural continued on because of the mental and physical strength and the "extreme skills" of Sar and his colleagues.<sup>214</sup>

#### **D. What was the line at the time?**

Above, I wrote that Pol Pot tried to rectify all cadres, in particular the important cadres, to hold the line above all else. What was the designated line at that time?

The 1971 Congress (I attended) determined that "Vietnam is a friend with whom there is a contradiction." This determination was the determination of a clear political line toward Vietnam, meaning they were not comrades in arms, but neither were they enemies. It was imperative to implement the principle of struggle in solidarity, struggle for solidarity. When Vietnam had been a friend, those who followed or supported Vietnam were still friends. So, there was no need to use weapons. When we assess this line, we see that Sao Phim was wrong and Ta Mok was also wrong. Sao Phim was wrong in saying that the 1971 Congress determined that Vietnam was a friend with whom there was a contradiction and there must not be any further close cooperation with them. Ta Mok and Kè Pok were wrong on the use of weapons to resolve a contradiction with those who followed Vietnam. This is what Pol Pot tried to sort out by having everyone hold the line above everything else. It was this line that Vorn Vet tried to implement in Sector 25, and actually he got some pleasing results, as Ben Kiernan has written.<sup>215</sup>

Let me also inform you that in the 1971 Congress there was another decision, to separate Sector 25 from the east Zone and combine it with Sector 15 of the Southwest

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<sup>214</sup> Please read page 235 above

<sup>215</sup> Ben Kiernan, "How Pol Pot Came to Power" pages 333-334

Zone to create a new Zone surrounding Phnom Penh that was called the Special Zone and hand it over to Vorn Vet to be responsible for. Now, after I have read Ben Kiernan, I understand why Pol Pot selected Vorn Vet to take charge of the Special Zone: Vorn Vet had a good a relationship with both Ta Mok and Sao Phim. At that time, his having good relationships with both parties to the contradiction was his strong point. But by 1978, the situation of the internal split had developed to the extent that each side could no longer live with the other, and Vorn Vet's efforts to keep his good relationship with Sao Phim now put himself in danger. But let's talk just about the period before 1975 first. At that time in Sector 25, the contradictions were stronger than they were anywhere else "and the situation was in great turmoil (Norn Suon)." To resolve this situation, Vorn Vet planned to remove Sector Secretary Sau Pum, who was from Hanoi, and replace him with Norn Suon. He had a cautious policy of reducing opposition to the maximum by keeping in place all of Sau Pum's former colleagues. When he initially began, the situation was already tense. At Zone level, Sao Phim was dragging his feet. So then, for more than three months, Sector 25 was under two competing state authorities. Norn Suon and Sau Pum had separate headquarters, and most of the troops were under Sau Pum's command. In his book that I mentioned above,<sup>216</sup> Ben Kiernan presents extracts from Norn Suon's confessions that recall the Vorn Vet's instructions to him in September 1971 before he took his new position, as follows: "He told me that Châmraen Sokh and Sei were traitors that had killed a combatant and were very closely connected to the Viet Cong, and not to take any measures at all that might result in war. I was to try to attract them to our side ... to wait for independence, and then we would make a decision. Then I tried to attract them to the side of the revolution and try to fulfill their missions to the best of their capabilities and not let the Vietnamese seize control of them ... A similar policy was implemented toward all forces that followed Vietnam, toward each level and stratum of the people down to the monks, to prevent the Vietnamese from seizing control of these forces to oppose our Revolutionary Organization. Vorn Vet also said that as for the Vietnamese troops in Sector 25, we would resolve this issue by whipping up the people to oppose them by every means, and we were to avoid the use of weapons when that could be avoided."

We wanted and we had to defend our people and our military forces. We had to primarily use politics. Later Norn Suon attracted a number of teachers that had previously worked with Sau Pum, Sok among them, who he appointed as his military commanders. Another approximately ten teachers were still loyal to Sau Pum. Regardless, there was no shooting and no loss of life, just a political dispute. The Cambodians from Hanoi dealt primarily with techniques and supplies (in their view, what types of weapons a company had to be equipped with). The others dealt primarily with stances, meaning independence, mastery, and self-reliance. They did not receive any assistance from foreign countries. Norn Suon did not mention the issue of Vietnam, even though his subordinates did. However, he concentrated on the peasantry more than Sau Pum had. Châmraen and Sei came along with Norn Suon, but continued to respect and be close to Sau Pum. One teacher who had worked with Sau Pum for one year but who later went along with Norn Suon recalled, "I saw that the two of them talked and had a good relationship when they

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<sup>216</sup> Ben Kiernan, "How Pol Pot Came to Power" page 332

met for discussions. I heard outsiders say that they were in conflict, but I saw them sort out issues together very normally.” Sok was one of those issues. They seemed to hate the Vietnamese very much and they had constant trouble with the Vietnamese, even though the Vietnamese troops and the Cambodian troops had a good relationship. Some of Sok’s troops were deployed near Pum’s location, and once during 1972, Sok prepared to fight Pum, but there was no fighting. Pum travelled on a motorcycle to meet Norn Suon, and the conflict was resolved.<sup>217</sup>

After describing all of this, Ben Kiernan added that Vorn Vet’s strategy was far more skilled than the strategy implemented at Baray. He was confused in thinking that Pol Pot had been behind Kè Pok in the killing of anyone who supported the Vietnamese. However, Ben Kiernan had previously spoken about the personality of Kè Vĩn alias Kè Pok back when the soldiers were chasing him down when he fled to the forests at Bos Pok in 1964.

Later, from my meetings and talks with former cadres and people that had known Kè Pok either directly or indirectly, they stated that Kè Pok really did have a hot hand like that since the time he worked in the Issarak. He was very superstitious. For several years after 1979 when the Vietnamese invaded Kampuchea he thought only about protecting the property that he had collected back when he held power, and he did not concentrate on or think about managing or leading troops. From then on, he kept on falling. This is a reflection of the feudal society in the Kampuchean countryside, a stratified society with leaders and bosses in which the leaders had power over subordinates, a society full of superstitions of every kind that the Issarak in general had lived in since childhood and was their inheritance from when they were Issarak. Let me give you another example to clarify the stances of the cadres who had been Issarak in comparison to the cadres who respected and followed the line of the leadership. Francois Bizot wrote about Vorn Vet’s opposition to Ta Mok’s refusal to release Bizot, even though Pol Pot had already decided to release him. This is another clear example on the stances of cadres who had been with the Issarak being the opposite of cadres who respected and followed the line of the CPK leadership. In this matter, Ta Mok clearly had different ideas. But Ta Mok was a member of the Standing Committee, and he had to have known and absorbed the policies of the CPK better than Kè Pok, who had only just become a member of the Central Committee during the 1971 Congress. It should also be remembered that Vorn Vet had been brought in by Saloth Sar to work with Sar in the Phnom Penh City Committee since 1959, and Pol Pot had proposed that Vorn Vet be promoted to lead this committee before he left Phnom Penh for the forests in 1963. This was an important period in Vorn Vet’s political history. It might be said that the efforts to organize Party into a monolithic unity were very difficult, in particular because the CPK had had two different tendencies from its very beginnings. There are many examples of Ta Mok being in agreement, but there still were other points on which he did not agree. What was Pol Pot to do? Abandon him, or keep on working on his morale and building him? Pol Pot understood that he had to keep on building him because each cadre was very valuable and building them had not been easy.

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<sup>217</sup> Ben Kiernan, “How Pol Pot Came to Power” page 334

### **E. Ben Kiernan claims the Politburo was passed over frequently ...**

And a smaller group made the decisions instead.<sup>218</sup>

In truth, in any movement, when the Statutes are not respected at all, the movement cannot prosper. The case mentioned by Ben Kiernan may have been the implementation of a principle stated in the CPK Statutes and in the statutes of all the other communist parties that is called centralized democracy; this was an important principle in their leadership. In theory, this principle came from the class natures of their parties, and their determination that they were workers' parties that had to have this principle to prevent people from other classes from being able to disguise themselves and join. Actually, this principle came from the requirements of secret struggle and the communication difficulties. This principle opened the way for the Standing Committee or the Party Secretary to have board decision-making rights, but they could not make any decision that was contrary to the lines designated during previous Congresses or the previous decisions of the Central Committee. In the CPK movement, the influence of Pol Pot's leadership on the Party steadily increased, especially from 1968-1969 until 1975. He had become "a historical leader whose decisions were never wrong."

### **F. A number of details**

- Why did the 1971 Congress that was held in broad form in the liberated zone continue to meet in secret from the general Party membership? This is an issue that should be understood. The reason was the incredibly complicated situation:

First, The CPK was still unable to go public. Had it done so, this would have led to a split in the Front with Norodom Sihanouk, and that would have been a loss to the struggle for national liberation.

Second, the issues that had to be discussed at that time, like determining just what Vietnam was, for example, were important issues in determining the line toward Vietnam that could not be discussed publicly.

In general, after the 1960 determination by the CPK that it was an independent Party, everything had to be done in secret from the "Vietnamese elder brothers." This was in large part what led to the CPK's work methods being different from those of the other communist parties of the world. Everything was secret.

- Why was it necessary to whip up the people to struggle and oppose Vietnam by every means, like Vorn Vet had instructed Norm Suon? This was because Vietnam was a

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<sup>218</sup> Ben Kiernan, "How Pol Pot Came to Power" page 311

friend with whom there was a contradiction: it had had the intent, and had committed many attempts, to govern Kampuchea. Therefore, the struggle had to use all means, but it was imperative to avoid the use of arms when that could be avoided.



## 2. Some situations or events that researchers did not think about

They have made accusations against Pol Pot about the evacuation of the people from Phnom Penh and the provincial towns, but in making those accusations they did not think about the incredibly difficult and violence-filled situation that the young and immature state authority faced. They forgot that a large part of the countryside had been smashed to bits by the bombing and had been abandoned. Phnom Penh had been threatened by the danger of starvation for one year before 17 April 1975. The factual situation was as has been described by Shawcross and Michael Vickery.

The thing that might have led to great danger for the young and immature state authority was the situation in which tens of thousands of people had already died and there were people who were lying in wait to keep on killing one another like that. These were very favorable conditions for the CIA agents to conduct sabotage and join with the remnants of the former Lon Nol army that had clearly hidden weapons in the city and in locations throughout the country to create rebellion in Phnom Penh and various other locations in the country. The greatest danger was that this rebellion and turmoil would create the opportunity for Vietnam to easily intervene from the outside and seize Kampuchea back from America under the pretext of coming to rescue it. At the time, in actuality, like it or not, the CIA and the Vietnamese communists were joining together to kill the new state authority. This was the situation that the leaders of the Khmer Rouge were most worried about.

Were there actually CIA agents inside Phnom Penh at that time? CIA officers, including a senior leader in Prey Nokor named Frank Snapp,<sup>219</sup> have clearly stated that they actually did maintain their radio communication networks and their secret branch networks in Kampuchea, but all of their networks were scattered because of the evacuation of the people from Phnom Penh.

Some authors suspect that Pol Pot exaggerated the danger of the Vietnamese to use it as a pretext to implement his extremist ideology. It is true that Pol Pot did not see any clear evidence of Vietnam creating the Khmer Rumdoh movement, but he did see these “Libration Army troops” join with Vietnam to attack his forces, and furthermore he clearly realized that the Vietnamese were not pleased with his policy of independence. In the end, the May 1976 Vietnamese ultimatum that we examined above clearly confirms that Pol Pot’s worries had concrete foundations. He clearly also saw that it was imperative to run fast, this from his personal discussions with Lê Duân on three occasions, during each of which there were tense contradictions. He had also read Vietnamese documents in detail. Do we still remember what he said after reading those Vietnamese documents in 1965? He said, “... After reading all those documents, I stopped believing in them I saw that they had established a Party Organization in our country to achieve a single strategic goal: the Indochina Federation. They had created a single party to govern a territory that had been consolidated into one ...”

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<sup>219</sup> William Shawcross, “The Tragedy That No One Thought About” page 352

And he was not just talking. After this first meeting, when he returned he changed the name of the Party to make it clear that from that day forward, the Cambodian party was independent from Vietnam, and he instructed each Zone to get ready to make one more step forward, to prepare for armed struggle regardless of what Lê Duân thought. Even with those efforts, it was almost too late. Lon Nol beheaded hundreds of peasants at Samlaut and at other locations before armed struggle could be made ready. When there was an armed struggle movement, the Vietnamese learned that Pol Pot refused to be their satellite. In general, researchers still do not see the CPK's stance of independence and still do not see the contradictions with the Vietnamese communists in this way. They see that this armed struggle was sparse and had no substantial meaning. They do not know how it changed the situation in Kampuchea; they do not know how it caused contradictions between the Vietnamese communists and the Cambodian party. The Vietnamese accused Pol Pot by saying that his refusal to listen to them and armed struggle had caused difficulties for Norodom Sihanouk and had caused him to give a free hand to the Americans to attack them in Ratanakiri and Mondulakiri and bomb their shelters in the B-52 "Menu" operations. Sihanouk had warned them too. They [researchers] also do not know how later, in late 1969, when Pol Pot went to Hanoi for a second visit, Lê Duân flew into a rage and created the atmosphere that had so shaken Khieu Ponnary.

After the coup and after the alliance between Norodom Sihanouk and the Khmer Rouge, the atmosphere changed to one of tight embraces. Pol Pot said that it changed 180 degrees. There was just non-stop talk of "friendship" and "solidarity as close as lips and teeth." But that lasted for only a moment. When Pol Pot refused to agree to their proposal for joint headquarters, the contradictions reoccurred. But this time, there were no outside manifestations, and the researchers found it even harder to see this. The contradictions and the clashes occurred repeatedly. When Pol Pot arrived in their country, suddenly Vietnamese troops were seen everywhere in Kampuchea. The Vietnamese said that whether or not Kampuchea agreed, they had to come. In general, researchers did not know this. Ben Kiernan knew, but he did not concentrate on examining this how these Vietnamese words and actions impacted Pol Pot's morale after his efforts over decades for the nation's honor.

After they came, they stuck their hands inside and stirred things up. They created two state authorities. This issue was only resolved after struggling with him for years. Then in the East, they seized the opportunity to expand their influence when they came to train cadres in all fields, including military cadres. They instructed East Zone troops to disguise themselves as a "Liberation Army" "that leaned toward Sihanouk" and "leaned toward Vietnam" to the point of crossing the Mekong River and entering each of the Zones and fighting back and forth until the liberation of the entire country. The researchers do not see the hand of Vietnam in all of this.

For one thing, both sides, the Kampuchean side and the Vietnamese side, covered up all of these matters. Afterwards, the Vietnamese side disseminated only the documents that were profitable to them. This is what has made it difficult for researchers to learn about matters from every angle. Furthermore, they may be subjective factors of love and

hate mixed in with all these matters, sometime without the researchers even realizing it. In general, they hate Pol Pot because of his “extremist” ideology; so, like it or not, they are biased. They forget to seek out the reasoning that led Pol Pot to have that extreme ideology. They forget the B-52 bombing of Kampuchea because Kampuchea refused to be the satellite of Vietnam. They do not feel the pain of the Vietnamese violations or the Vietnamese sticking their hands inside to stir up Kampuchea like the Cambodians who have repeatedly struggles against those hardships. Even a large number of Party cadres do not know about all the Vietnamese violations against Cambodians. To Pol Pot, matters like those summarized above all confirmed his conclusion from 1965 onward that, “They created one party to govern one combined territory.” Now he had created a CPK that was independent from the Vietnamese communists that the Vietnamese charged was “reactionary,” “narrowly nationalistic,” and “the servant of China.” The Vietnamese could not allow that. The Soviet Union understood that this was a grave violation of the principle of “international proletarianism.” You all know and have heard how in Eastern Europe they had denounced similar actions. But now, when Vietnam still needed Kampuchean territory as a backstop, they would be patient for a while and then after they liberated and reunited their country, they would turn back to sorting out and putting an end to Pol Pot. These are the roots of that May 1976 ultimatum. This is what Pol Pot had known in advance. That is why he said that Kampuchea had to get ready quickly to face off against and counter the threat from Hanoi. This is why he said, “We must run fast to keep the Yuon from running us down.” During the war, we ran fast and liberated Phnom Penh before their liberation. If the Vietnamese had liberated the South before Phnom Penh had been liberated, there may have been major danger. Having outrun them once, after liberation it was imperative to run again. There could be no hesitation. This is why Pol Pot saw that the expansion of high-level cooperatives throughout the country had made “the revolution in Kampuchea 30 years faster than the revolutions in China, (North) Korea and Vietnam.” He had great faith in the cooperatives because since the cooperatives had been first organized in 1971, the CPK had been able to control rice, control the economy, control the people, and negotiate with the Vietnamese communists to demand that they hand the troops and the state authorities that they had organized back over to Cambodia, and they agreed to transport ammunition that was Chinese aid to Cambodia and agreed to respect Cambodian sovereignty. Were it not for the organization of the cooperatives, Kampuchea would have had to suffer all the consequences of the situation in Vietnam, including respecting the 1973 Paris Agreement between Vietnam and America. In late 1972 and early 1973, because of raising the level of the cooperatives that had been previously organized to high-level cooperatives, the Khmer Rouge were able to continue the struggle independently. Those high-level cooperatives became the instruments of the state authorities to win the war so that the small country of Kampuchea could struggle on to gain independence for the great and intermediate powers and maintain its independence. Researchers do not see very well the strategic role of setting up the countryside into cooperatives during the Five-Year War. Now, when he wanted to sort out the food supply quickly, when he wanted to escape from poverty, when he wanted to modernize agriculture, when he wanted to lay the foundations so that Kampuchea could advance in steps toward industrialization, and when he wanted to run fast so that Vietnam would not run us down, Pol Pot looked again to the important role of the cooperatives. Pol Pot saw that through the cooperatives, in particular through the

high-level cooperatives, the land throughout the country had come under the ownership of the people. So then, the CPK might lead the people in building dams and digging feeder canals criss-crossing throughout the countryside to sort out the water problems and irrigate the rice paddies during both the rainy and dry season. This is why Pol Pot said the expansion of the high-level cooperatives throughout the country had made “the revolution in Kampuchea 30 years faster than the revolutions in China, (North) Korea, and Vietnam.” Expressed differently, in order to get dams and criss-crossing feeder canals to irrigate the Kampuchean countryside, when we wanted to sort out sufficient food quickly, when we wanted to escape from poverty, when we wanted to modernize agriculture, when we wanted to lay the foundation to move in steps toward industrialization, we had to carry out socialist revolution, and each of us in the organization and all of us had to strive to fight to eradicate private ownership and equip ourselves and our units with “collective stance” so that we all could be loyal to one another in our status as members of the cooperatives and join forces happily at work without the need for anyone to coerce us. But to reach those goals, since the country had just merged from a war of destruction and was facing the dangers of starvation and death, the first initiative was to overcome the situation of incredible hardship that the young and immature state authorities had to face. So then, some coercion was required for a while, coercion to work in a situation of lacking everything for both those who were used to it and those who were not, because time was very urgent. When there was enough food and vast checkerboard rice paddies, gradually we all would be pleased at having participated in building the country with our own hands and we would all be pleased with ourselves and become more crystal clear. This was the overall line, but the cadres in the base areas had to absorb the line and implement the line, knowing how to be flexible and adapt to the reality of who was ill and acceding to the working strength of each individual, not simply coercing without explain the reasons to them at all. This issue of explaining the reasons to the masses was a difficult one. It is my understanding that the CPK did not have many cadres who knew how to explain this deeply to the masses. There were many study sessions to build them on this, but as I understand it, they did not grasp the theme very well. The reason I dare to say this is because during 1999-2000 when I went around seeking to understand the lives of our people in a number of villages in the old Khmer Rouge base areas I saw that the villages had changed from the villages I had know in the countryside before when I left Phnom Penh in 1967. Husbands and wives were cursing one another. The husbands were drunk. The wives were playing cards. So then, they were constantly arguing breaking plates and pots, kicking the walls of the houses, chopping or burning every little thing to pieces. When they recovered from being drunk, they made up with one another again. As for growing vegetables around the houses to help change their livelihoods, that was not often seen. Through this, I concluded that the CPK cadres in general did not know how to work with the people and did not know how to organize the society or govern the masses in the villages, subdistricts, or cooperatives. In working with the people, one must be humble. Using the language that they used to use in the CPK, it is imperative to be stick close to the masses, to have the line of the masses, and to know how to carry the word of the general political line to the masses and disseminate it so that the masses will absorb it. They were skilled at making war. War demands bravery. They knew how to gather up the troops in the Issarak style.

In planning to build the economy, I saw instructions like the following. “If fifteen years from now we have not been able to achieve our goals, this will not have been due to external factors, but internal, meaning Party leadership. With a stance of independence, mastery, and self-reliance, the Party at every echelon, from Zone to Sector to District to the cooperatives, must prepare detailed plans in every field with clear numbers. They must explain to and instruct the masses in the cooperatives. They must equip the peasantry with the views and stances of the proletarian class. If not, we will be unable to modify and modernize the agriculture of our country. We will do as we used to do during time of war, meaning whip up mass movements and have the masses join the movements. When the movements are in motion, the issue of water will be half-way sorted out. We did this successfully during the war. Now it is even easier. The issue now is the Party at its various echelons. It must organize its leadership line correctly and set clear economic goals.”<sup>220</sup>

On this, I recall the mobilisation of the people to build dams and dig feeder canals. The wake-up gong was sounded at 3 or 4 a.m. The communal meal started in the evening and was not even finished by midnight. Due to a shortage of plates, they had to eat in turns. In the morning, the gong was sounded again to wake people up at 3 or 4 a.m. to get them into formation. By the time they were in formation, it was daybreak. Then they assembled the people at the worksites without thinking of how many hoes or carry-baskets were at the worksites so they could decide how many people to send to the worksites and how many should be kept for other work or whether they could take turns resting. The Zone Secretaries or Sector Secretaries might have gone down to give instructions on these matters. When Pol Pot heard of this, he gave detailed instructions during a meeting of the Central Committee. Now when I think back on this, I see that “preparing detailed plans with clear numbers in every field from the Zones, Sectors, Districts, on down to the cooperatives” was not done by anyone: even the Zone Secretaries and the Sector Secretaries did not know how to do that.

But in my opinion, this was not a technical matter. The primary issue was a spirit of responsibility, concentrating on the destiny of the nation and the people and a spirit of responsibility for the lives of the people.

In conclusion, how can we summarize the Democratic Kampuchea regime? Most researchers understand that the regime was overthrown because of Pol Pot’s extremist policies after 1975.

Philip Short emphasized the feudal nature of the six Zone Chairmen, and he adds in clarification that this was no accident: they had all begun their lives in the struggle under Vietnamese leadership. He saw that the Vietnamese had created the Sihanoukist Khmer Rumdoh army. However, he did not see how the Vietnamese used Chăn Chakrei to disguise himself as Khmer Rumdoh to trick Norodom Sihanouk. He did not see how the Vietnamese stuck their hands inside and stirred up the CPK and the Revolutionary Army of Kampuchea to break apart. He did not see the minutes of the 14 May 1976 broad meeting of CPK Standing Committee either.

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<sup>220</sup> See Annex 4

It is my understanding that Vietnam's sticking its hands inside and stirring up the CPK and the Revolutionary Army of Kampuchea and their May 1976 ultimatum were not separate events. This issue must be researched further.

My efforts to explain this period of the history of our country are to inform you about what I understand to be the truth of the nation's history according to my "research," as I have already said. In this sense, I hope that I am making a contribution by presenting some documentation that might be useful to open the opportunity for future researchers along a path that may match our nation's history better than what they have been saying up until now. There is still much more to be researched. It is my understanding that the Democratic Kampuchea movement played an important role during a period of our nation's history that no one may scratch out or erase. If someone were to scratch out or erase or change it, the scratches or the erasures could be seen. Why? Because it is clear that Saloth Sar or Pol Pot sacrificed his life to fight the Americans and fight the Vietnamese communists to defend the sovereignty of the nation. And both of them had tricky maneuvers to attract or confuse the forces of the nation and internal forces to go along with them. So then, the fight was very intense for our small country.

In 1960, I, like the other "progressive intellectuals," had the profound objective of an independent economy as a foundation for the independence of my country and with a firm will wanted to end the special privileges and corruption that had led to a handful but increasing number of people who did not know how to be embarrassed about the endless suffering of huge masses of people. I strived to fight with the means I had when I was a member of the Parliament. But I lost, and I was forced to flee from Phnom Penh to save my life. I took shelter under the protection of a movement that, according to some people whom I had known in Paris, was striving toward similar goals but which used a different methods that I could not.

Now, my views are still the same; they have not changed.

But, if I speak instead of my personal emotions, previously I believed that communism was the only path by which our country and our people could reach true independence and sovereignty and true dignity and happiness. Previously I believed that communism was pure international fraternity. But the experience was very bitter: the lies and deception, the ambition and greed, the murky maneuvers, the eating the head when the head was fully-cooked and eating the tail when the tail was fully-cooked, the constant desire to eat away at and hollow-out the strength of our country. Do I regret that my life did not achieve any results whatsoever? No. In my life, I tried with all of my capacity to pass through hardships and suffering to the best of my possibilities, always being loyal to myself, my country, my people, and my nation. I have done nothing to make me ashamed before anyone.

If I speak of my personal emotions, what I regret most is that our country lost the opportunity for national reconciliation presented by the Paris Agreements for reasons I have already mentioned in the introduction. In Chapter 6 we will try to examine in further

detail the subterfuge to distort or misdirect the Paris Agreements to eradicate the Khmer Rouge and prevent national reconciliation between the Four Parties.