

OUTLINE OF THE CAMBODIAN PEACE PLAN

Extract from Senate Hansard, 24 November, 1989.

All of us share a passionate conviction that the killing in Cambodia has gone on too long, that it must stop and that a workable, durable solution-to ensure that it never happens again-must be found. All of us share an equally passionate conviction that Pol Pot and the other genocidal butchers of the Khmer Rouge killing fields should never again be allowed to exercise power in Cambodia.

Australia has been among those countries working hard to try to find such a solution. Bill Hayden took a series of initiatives through the mid-1980s which were very important in helping break the log-jam which then existed, and more recently I have been involved in what seems like an endless series of meetings and conferences-with the regional countries, the permanent members of the Security Council, other involved and interested countries such as France, India and Canada, and the four internal Cambodian parties-trying to craft a strategy which will bring the conflict to an end once and for all.

At the Paris conference two months ago we came very close to succeeding. A comprehensive settlement strategy was mapped out involving, in broad terms, the monitored withdrawal of all Vietnamese forces; a cease-fire; the cessation of external support; the creation of a transitional administration; and the holding of free elections-all under the supervision of an international control mechanism. That settlement strategy foundered for a number of stated reasons. But only one of them was really crucial: one side to the conflict, the combined resistance forces of Prince Sihanouk, Son Sann and the Khmer Rouge, together with their international backers, demanded a place for each of the four internal parties, including the Khmer Rouge, in the transitional administration; this was a demand which the People's Republic of Kampuchea Government of Hun Sen, and its international backers, were not prepared to concede.

Since then there has been a resurgence of fighting. The external backers of the internal Cambodian parties have continued to supply them with arms and materiel, and positions have hardened rather than softened. A number of international efforts have been mounted to renew the dialogue process, some of them very public, others much less so. We particularly applaud the efforts that are being made to find ways through the impasse by Thai Prime Minister Chatichai, the Paris conference co-chairmen, Foreign Ministers Alatas and Dumas, and United States Secretary of State Baker. It is my sincere hope that these efforts will lead to real progress, but so far none have borne fruit.

International opinion remains overwhelmingly in favour of a comprehensive settlement-in which all the outstanding issues would be simultaneously addressed-as the support for the Association for South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) resolution in the United Nations last week made abundantly clear. But at the same time it is becoming obvious that some of the detailed elements in the kind of comprehensive settlement proposal that has been on the table to date may need some re-thinking if the new deadlock is to be resolved. Everyone acknowledges that the problem causing most difficulty is the composition of the transitional administration, and in particular the role proposed in that administration for the Khmer Rouge-even on the basis that the Khmer Rouge would have but a minority voice in a quadripartite administration, and that it would be shorn of its former leadership.

In the last few weeks I have been exploring with a number of my ASEAN and foreign ministerial colleagues, and with others including the Deputy Prime Minister of the Hun Sen Administration in Cambodia, Mr Kong Som Ol, and US Congressman Stephen Solarz, whether it might not be possible to create a form of transitional administration, still within the framework of a genuinely comprehensive settlement, which did not give rise to the same objections and apprehensions as the existing proposal on the table. I further discussed this whole issue this morning with the heads, or their representatives, of all the ASEAN diplomatic missions to Australia, outlining to them the possible approach that I now put on the public record, and which I will of course be following up with my foreign ministerial colleagues.

The idea that I have found most attractive, and which I believe deserves very close examination by all the participants at the Paris conference, is one that would involve building a transitional administration directly around the authority of the United Nations-some variation of the kind of UN administration which previously has been put in place in comparable circumstances, most recently in Namibia. Such an arrangement would mean that no Cambodian party would be in a position to decide the country's destiny pending free and fair elections organised by the UN and held under international supervision. It would involve a compromise by the present Hun Sen Administration-being prepared to step back from its present role as the de facto government of the country-and by the three resistance parties, which would not have a role in the transitional administration either.

The proposal addresses concerns about the Khmer Rouge being in a position of even marginal, transitional authority, which so many people have found abhorrent for obvious reasons, given its appalling record. It also clearly preserves the objectives of a comprehensive settlement and, crucially, provides the framework within which the external players, including China, may be prepared to draw back from the conflict. The idea is not, in fact, dissimilar from one suggested to me by Prince Sihanouk, at a meeting I had with him in early August in his residence in Paris, that Cambodia be placed under a form of 'UN trusteeship'.

It would be difficult, if not impossible, for the UN to play the role envisaged for it were

the Cambodian seat to remain occupied-as it is at the moment in New York-by one contesting group, the CGDK. Australia has never accepted the claim of either the CGDK or the Hun Sen Government to be the legitimate occupants of the UN seat, as was made clear on the last occasion the issue was tested-in 1982. Other countries have in the past taken different views about the occupancy question. But, as became very clear in the corridors of the Paris conference, there is very little, if any, dissent from the view that any international control mechanism to supervise the transition to peace in Cambodia should be under the authority of the UN, and that a logical corollary of this is that the Cambodian seat at the UN should be declared vacant, or at least occupied by whoever constitutes the transitional administration, for the duration of that transition period.

As the Australian permanent representative to the UN, Dr Wilenski, stated in the General Assembly on 15 November, Australia assumes 'that as part of a comprehensive settlement a change in seating will take place-either the seat will be declared vacant or will be occupied by the interim authority, until elections install a legitimate government which can take its rightful place in this body'. If the UN itself were to be the interim authority, it follows that the Cambodian seat would have to be declared vacant. These are ideas that I shall be further exploring with my counterparts in the weeks and months ahead. A sane and civilised way through the present impasse in that tragic country must be found, and the Australian Government will not rest until it is.