

PROSPECTS FOR A CAMBODIAN PEACE SETTLEMENT

Ministerial Statement by Senator Gareth Evans, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade,
Senate, 6 December 1990

It is now just over a year since my statement in the Senate on 24 November 1989 which launched Australia's peace initiative on Cambodia, and an appropriate time for a statement reviewing the progress which has been made in diplomatic efforts over that time to resolve this tragic conflict. I make it with three particular objectives.

First, it is appropriate to put on record, so far as is now possible, the full extent of Australia's involvement in these diplomatic efforts. It is not yet certain that the Cambodian conflict will be capable of final resolution by the end of this year or early next, but that is now, at the very least, a real possibility. If a comprehensive settlement is achieved within that kind of timeframe, along the lines that Australia initially proposed and the international community has since adopted, then we will have played a role of which we can be very proud in bringing to an end the killing and suffering which has so plagued Cambodia's modern history, and in removing a major source of international discord in our region.

Secondly, it is appropriate to answer those few persistent critics, both within and outside Australia, who argue that there is something fundamentally flawed or misconceived about the Australian peace plan, in that the Khmer Rouge will be able to exploit the peace process militarily, politically or both - particularly in the proposed transitional period under UN administration - and will in any event, at the end of the day, simply not accept any outcome which does not leave them in control of the country. It is important that clear answers be given to these kinds of concerns lest there be any move at the last minute to dilute or move away from what remains Cambodia's best chance to achieve a lasting peace.

Thirdly, I believe it is timely to make the point that while we are much closer than we have ever been to reaching an effective, workable comprehensive settlement to the Cambodian problem, there are grounds for fear that the window of opportunity in this respect may well start to close around the end of this year. The key international players - not least the Permanent Five Members of the Security Council, whose role this year has been central in maintaining the peace momentum - do not have infinite reservoirs of commitment and patience. As other major issues continue to clamour for attention, and if the Cambodian parties themselves remain intransigent, it cannot be assumed that the key international players will not walk away from the Cambodian problem. If they do, the result can only be continuing civil war and possibly worse.

The Cambodian Conflict: Settlement Efforts Prior to November 1989

In April 1941 the French, still in effective colonial control of Indo-China, ensured the election of Prince Norodom Sihanouk as King of Cambodia, although initially he performed a largely titular role. The period between 1941 and his overthrow in 1970 was characterised by efforts by Sihanouk to assert growing independence and effective neutrality for Cambodia in a region deeply involved in continuing conflict. In 1955 he abdicated as King in favour of his father, resumed the title Prince and also took over executive authority for the government as Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade. Following the death of his father in 1960, he assumed the title of Head of State, but continued to exercise executive authority.

In March 1970 Prince Sihanouk was overthrown in a military coup by Marshal Lon Nol and went into exile in Beijing where he established the Royal Government of the National Union of Cambodia (GRUNC). Over the next five years the Lon Nol regime's hold on power declined in the face of both internal corruption and external threat from Sihanouk supporters, allied with the powerful Khmer Rouge guerillas. In 1975 the Khmer Rouge occupied Phnom Penh, overthrew the Lon Nol regime and Sihanouk took up his position as Head of State. Sihanouk found that he could have no place, however, in what became quickly obvious was the monstrously cruel regime of Pol Pot's Democratic Kampuchea (DK), and he resigned as Head of State in April 1976, but remained in Phnom Penh under house arrest until January 1979.

The virulent anti-Vietnamese attitudes of the Khmer Rouge led to border clashes with Vietnam and eventually to invasion by Vietnam on 25 December 1978. Phnom Penh was captured on 7 January 1979, the DK Government ousted, and the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) proclaimed on 11 January under the leadership of Heng Samrin (Hun Sen became in 1985 Prime Minister of the PRK, subsequently renamed the State of Cambodia (SOC)). In June 1982 the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK) was established in Kuala Lumpur, bringing together - united in their opposition to the Vietnamese invasion if little else - the non-communist Sihanoukists and the Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF) under the leadership of Son Sann, together with the communist Khmer Rouge. (The CGDK was later renamed the National Government of Cambodia (NGC) in February 1990).

Australia, under the Fraser Government, made clear in 1980 its decision to derecognise the DK regime and formally did so in February 1981. No Australian Government has recognised either the SOC or the NGC since, although the recognition issue has been academic since our 1988 decision to recognise henceforth only states and not governments. (On the question of who should have credentials to occupy the Cambodian seat in the United Nations, Australia has abstained since 1981.)

While not supporting either side to the conflict Australia has, however, been consistently active in pursuit of a settlement of what is undoubtedly the region's most pressing source of instability and a situation which has for far too long been the scene of horrific human suffering. After 1983, the Australian Government became particularly prominent among those countries seeking a solution. Along with others, we sought to identify areas of shared concern in the positions of the various parties to the Cambodia dispute and sought to encourage dialogue on the basis of the following broad principles: withdrawal of all Vietnamese forces from Cambodia, matched by an effective arrangement to prevent Pol Pot and his Khmer Rouge forces from returning to power in Cambodia; free and fair elections for Cambodia; the creation of conditions for the peaceful return of displaced Cambodians to Cambodia; and guarantees that a post settlement Cambodia would be neutral, independent and non-aligned.

Until July 1988 there was, nonetheless, little substantive movement towards a peaceful settlement. The period until then was characterised by ritualistic statements and plans for settlement incorporating aspects that were known to be objectionable to the other participants. Australian activities were, nevertheless, vigorous and included visits by Mr Hayden to Vietnam and Laos in 1983 and 1985, and visits to Australia by Vietnamese Foreign Minister Thach in 1984 and Prince Sihanouk in 1985. Specific Australian initiatives designed to help break the stalemate included the Pol Pot tribunal concept and the series of seminars organised by Griffith University and supported financially by the Australian Government.

Following Mr Hayden's efforts in the mid 1980s regional countries, and in particular Indonesia, sought to play a more active diplomatic role in pursuit of a solution to the Cambodia problem. These efforts led to the two Jakarta Informal Meetings (JIMs) in July 1988 and February 1989. These meetings were inconclusive. Although they did result in some clearer definitions of the issues involved, there was no progress on lessening the differences among the four Khmer factions.

Hopes for a major move forward had arisen with the announcement by Vietnam in January 1989 that it was prepared to withdraw all its troops from Cambodia by September that year. Seeking to force a breakthrough, France judged in mid 1989 that the time was ripe for a full international Conference on Cambodia. The Paris International Conference on Cambodia (PICC) was accordingly convened, with joint Indonesian chairmanship, in Paris in July/August 1989: it brought together all four Cambodian factions, the six ASEAN countries, the Permanent Five Members of the UN Security Council, Vietnam, Laos, Australia, Canada and India as well as Zimbabwe (representing the Non-Aligned Movement) and a representative of the UN Secretary-General.

In the event the Paris Conference failed, but not without coming very close to succeeding. A comprehensive settlement strategy was mapped out involving, in broad terms, the monitored withdrawal of all Vietnamese forces; a ceasefire; 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. It also involved measures to guarantee the neutrality of Cambodia and non-interference in its internal affairs; to deal with the repatriation of refugees and displaced persons; and to ensure the reconstruction of the country.

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 PRK Government of Hun Sen, and its international backers, were simply not prepared to concede.

Vietnam proceeded to withdraw its formed military units more or less on schedule, but this was accompanied not by a renewed momentum for peace - despite various efforts by the Paris Co-Chairmen, the Thai Prime Minister and the US Secretary of State - but rather a resurgence of fighting, continued external supplies of arms and material, and a general hardening of diplomatic positions. Although international opinion remained overwhelmingly in favour of a comprehensive settlement - as the UN General Assembly vote on the ASEAN resolution again proved - the stumbling block remained the composition of the proposed transitional administration, in particular the role proposed in it for the Khmer Rouge: even on the basis that the Khmer Rouge would have but a minor role in a quadripartite administration, and that it would be shorn of its former leadership.

It was to break this impasse that the Australian peace proposal, announced in outline in the Senate on 24 November 1989, was put forward.

The Australian Proposal and Diplomatic Developments Since

The central concept of the Australian proposal to reinvigorate the peace process was very simple. So as to sidestep the power-sharing issue which had bedevilled the Paris Conference, and constrain the role of the Khmer Rouge in the transitional arrangements, we proposed that the United Nations be directly involved in the civil administration of Cambodia during the transitional period. Along with a UN military presence to monitor the ceasefire and cessation of external military assistance, and a UN role in organising and conducting elections, UN involvement in the transitional administrative arrangements would ensure a neutral political environment conducive to free and fair general elections.

The Australian initiative recognised that a logical consequence of such a role for the United Nations would mean having the Cambodia seat at the United Nations either declared vacant or transferred to a neutral representative Cambodian body for the duration of the transitional period. In other important regards, the Australian initiative preserved

the objectives of a comprehensive political settlement as defined at the Paris Conference.

The idea of United Nations involvement in a transitional authority was not in itself new, although the degree of detail with which the concept was subsequently developed certainly was. Prince Sihanouk had in March 1981, and occasionally subsequently, raised the idea of some form of United Nations trusteeship. And during 1989, US Congressman Stephen Solarz had developed the specific idea of a neutral United Nations interim administration: discussions I had with Mr Solarz in New York last October and subsequently have been crucial in shaping my own thinking.

In advocating the very substantially enhanced UN role in the settlement that we did, the Australian Government recognised that we were being ambitious. Though well experienced in peace-keeping operations and monitoring elections, the United Nations has not so far had a role in the civil administration of one of its member States, nor in having primary responsibility for organising and conducting elections as distinct from monitoring them. In addition, conditions within Cambodia - including the potentially fragile character of any ceasefire, the difficulty of monitoring guerilla forces, and the lack of developed transport and communications infrastructure - would mean that the overall UN operation would be much more difficult than that which had been experienced in most other situations.

While recognising from the outset the inherent difficulty and complexity of what we were proposing, the Australian Government was encouraged by the new vitality and credibility the United Nations had been able to demonstrate through its success in facilitating an end to the Iran-Iraq war and the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, and its role in implementing the Namibian settlement. The transformation of East-West relations under way in 1989 was also relevant to our calculations in two ways. First, close collaboration between the United States and the Soviet Union on a number of international disputes had strengthened markedly the collective authority and influence of the Five Permanent Members of the UN Security Council. Secondly, as the effects of historic changes in the Soviet Union and Europe worked their way through to the Asia-Pacific region, it was becoming clear that the Soviet Union, Vietnam and probably China were more interested than before in achieving a Cambodian settlement if their minimum objectives could be obtained. Despite these positive pointers, however, we knew that a long, gruelling effort would be required to translate the Australian proposal into reality.

The initial international response to the Australian proposal was nothing less than quite remarkable. It very quickly became clear that the idea was one whose time had come. Within a matter of weeks, most of the participants in the Paris Conference had picked up the proposal for an enhanced UN role as a viable way around the power-sharing impasse and the problem of the Khmer Rouge, and given it varying degrees of public as well as private endorsement.

This process was considerably assisted by a remarkable feat of diplomatically effective endurance by Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Deputy Secretary, Michael Costello. He had been tasked early in December 1989 to pay a quick visit to Hanoi - in between talks scheduled on other matters in Hawaii and Tokyo - to take preliminary soundings. The response was so encouraging, and developed with each successive meeting such a snowball effect, that this initial detour turned into a series of 30 major meetings with key players in 13 countries over 21 days straddling the December 1989-January 1990 period. During the course of this odyssey the Australian 'idea' became a fully fledged Australian 'initiative' or 'plan', as we constantly refined and developed the detailed elements of the proposal and responded to suggestions or criticisms from our various interlocutors.

I was particularly encouraged by the positive reaction of the US Administration, which had the foresight to propose to the Soviet Union in late 1989 that they join the other three Permanent Members of the Security Council in a series of consultations on Cambodia. Representatives of the Permanent Five met in Paris on 15-16 January and agreed by consensus on a set of sixteen principles which would form the basis of their future discussions. Those principles included strong endorsement of the concept of an enhanced United Nations role in the transitional period.

The January meeting of the Permanent Five was significant in another sense. It marked the start of a two-track international approach to the Cambodia problem - the Permanent Five process and the Paris Conference process - between which a productive interaction has continued all this year.

By late January, Indonesian Foreign Minister Alatas, who, as Co-Chairman of the Paris Conference, had been exploring the possibility of an informal regional meeting on Cambodia, felt sufficiently encouraged to convene a meeting in Jakarta on 26-28 February involving the four Cambodian parties, Vietnam and Laos and the ASEAN countries. In recognition of the contribution we were making to the peace process, Australia was invited to attend as a resource delegation.

In preparation for the Jakarta Informal Meeting on Cambodia (IMC), as it became known, I despatched a technical mission to visit Cambodia, Bangkok and the Thai-Cambodia border area from 2 to 16 February to gather information on the administrative structures of the State of Cambodia and of the National Government of Cambodia, with a view to filling in gaps in data necessary for the development of a United Nations role in Cambodia leading to free and fair elections. Working very rapidly, with a Departmental task force now numbering over a dozen senior officers, we produced in time for distribution at the Jakarta Meeting a 155-page series of Working Papers, incorporating the technical mission's findings and covering in some detail all the necessary elements of a comprehensive settlement.

The Papers were subsequently published as Cambodia: an Australian Peace Proposal - the now familiar "Red Book". They examined in particular detail a role for the United Nations in civil administration, organising and conducting elections and in maintaining a secure environment in which Cambodians might exercise their electoral choice free from fear, intimidation and violence. The Papers also explored a range of costings. Conventional wisdom had it that such an exercise would be beyond the resources of the United Nations. Our indicative calculations showed that such a proposal (estimated, for the preferred 'mid-range' scenario, to cost \$US 1.3 billion for 18 months) was both practicable and affordable.

The Jakarta IMC came very close to reaching agreement on a statement of principles providing for an enhanced role for the United Nations in a comprehensive settlement, but in the end it just failed to do so, consensus breaking down on the question of whether the agreed record should make specific reference to "the prevention of recurrence of genocidal policies and practices". While the outcome was disappointing in that regard, the meeting did begin a process of consensus-building and confirmed that if there was to be a way forward, it must be through an enhanced role for the United Nations. Moreover, the concepts and suggestions in the Australian Working Papers began to permeate international thinking, and found expression in papers developed by the Permanent Five over the course of six major consultative meetings on Cambodia they held between January and August this year.

Despite alternate gloom and false dawns, the negotiating process has ground forward during 1990. Continual Australian diplomacy both in and around Indo-China, at the United Nations, and in Permanent Five capitals has helped maintain the renewed momentum which our initial initiative generated. Necessarily our role during this period has been supportive and back-room in character, rather than politically centre-stage, but it has been no less substantial and constructive for that, and has been widely acknowledged as such.

In recent months the accumulated diplomatic efforts of all concerned have borne fruit, with five significant developments occurring in fairly rapid succession. In noting these recent achievements I pay particular tribute to the valuable personal contribution that has been made to the international negotiating process by my friend and colleague, the Indonesian Foreign Minister Mr Ali Alatas, whose perseverance and resourcefulness through a series of difficult meetings hosted in Jakarta by his Government have been most impressive.

First, at its sixth meeting on Cambodia, in New York on 27-28 August, the Permanent Five reached agreement on a framework document setting out the key elements of a comprehensive political settlement of the Cambodian conflict based on an enhanced UN role. Along with other interested governments, Australia welcomed this document as a major contribution to the peace process. While there were naturally areas where we

wanted to see further elaboration, we considered it to represent a skilful and judicious balance of the various interests involved.

Secondly, at a meeting in Jakarta on 9-10 September hosted by Indonesia and France as Paris Conference Co-Chairmen, the four Cambodian parties accepted the Permanent Five framework in its entirety as a basis for settling the Cambodian conflict, and agreed to establish a Supreme National Council (SNC) as called for in the Permanent Five framework, which would, among other things occupy the Cambodian seat in the United Nations. At Indonesia's invitation, Australian representatives attended this meeting and helped behind the scenes achieve a successful outcome.

Thirdly, the United Nations itself endorsed the basic elements of the peace plan, urging the parties to elaborate the Permanent Five framework into a concluded comprehensive political settlement in UN Security Council Resolution 668 of 20 September, and UN General Assembly Resolution 45/3 of 15 October. These resolutions also welcomed the agreement of the Cambodian parties to form an SNC "as the unique legitimate body and source of authority in which, throughout the transitional period, the independence, national unity and sovereignty of Cambodia is embodied", noting that the SNC would "designate its representatives to occupy the seat of Cambodia at the United Nations".

Fourthly, the Paris Co-Chairmen hosted a Working Group meeting in Jakarta on 9-10 November at which agreement was reached on the form and structure of a comprehensive settlement negotiating text. This meeting was attended by the Paris Conference Co-Chairmen (Indonesia and France), the Co-Chairmen of the Conference's three Working Committees (Canada and India, Malaysia and Laos, Japan and Australia), the other four Permanent Members of the Security Council and a representative of the UN Secretary General. Australia had prepared and circulated a full draft negotiating text as an input in to the Working Group meeting, and this work was substantially drawn upon during the discussions.

Fifthly, pursuant to the mandate given to the Paris Co-Chairmen by the Jakarta Working Group meeting to complete the drafting of a negotiating text, representatives of the Co-Chairmen and the UN Secretary-General met with Permanent Five officials in Paris on 23-26 November and reached consensus on a full draft comprehensive agreement.

These developments, cumulatively, represent a particularly satisfying result for Australia, not least because there is at last achievement of a central objective we have pursued since February this year: agreement by the Permanent Five and other key players in the Paris Conference process to approach the final stages of a comprehensive settlement process working from a single negotiating text. No-one, including Australia, believes the present draft text is yet perfect, but it is certainly now in a shape that will make rapidly achievable the final negotiation of a comprehensive settlement at a resumed Paris Conference -

provided always the will is genuinely there to make this possible.

The remaining steps in the settlement process are: first, for the SNC to meet, resolve outstanding questions about its composition and chairmanship, and indicate its willingness to join in a resumed Paris Conference; secondly, for the PICC Co-ordination Committee, involving all Paris Conference participants, including the SNC representing Cambodia, to meet to finalise the text of the comprehensive settlement agreement; and thirdly, for a Ministerial session of the Paris Conference to convene to endorse and sign that agreement. After these steps have all been taken, it would be then for the UN Security Council to pass a resolution instructing the Secretary-General to take the necessary action to implement the settlement.

The most optimistic assessment has been that these steps, up to the point of the Ministerial signature, can all still be completed before Christmas 1990. But that is now an extremely optimistic scenario; certainly it depends crucially, in the first instance, on the willingness of the SNC to commence immediately full participation in the negotiation process.

Questions raised about the Australian UN Peace Plan

Notwithstanding all the momentum now accumulated behind the peace plan originally proposed by Australia and now endorsed in outline by the UN (hereafter referred to as the "UN peace plan"), criticism persists in certain quarters about certain aspects of it. The most important objections are that it makes too many concessions to the Khmer Rouge who, it is said, will be able to exploit the process politically, militarily, or both - particularly in the proposed transitional period under UN administration - and who will not in any event accept and final outcome which does not leave them in control of the country.

I. The first question raised by this kind of criticism is why we seek to engage the Khmer Rouge in the peace process at all. Why not simply take the position that their past record of atrocities entitles them to no consideration at all, and that the best option in these circumstances is to establish relations with the Phnom Penh government and encourage it to hold free elections - in which at least the non-communist resistance would be able to participate - as soon as possible? Now that Vietnam had withdrawn virtually all its troops, and was no longer sustaining by occupation the government it had installed, was it not now possible to accept, at least pending elections, the SOC as the legitimate Government of Cambodia?

This course has not been without its temptations, but is not one that has, hitherto, been able to withstand close scrutiny. If it were simply a matter of adopting a strategy that would effectively isolate and marginalise the Khmer Rouge, not very many voices would be heard in strenuous opposition. But the point is, simply, that the Khmer Rouge cannot

be effectively isolated and marginalised, with its military influence nullified, so long as it continues to be supplied, especially by China, with arms and money and diplomatic support. China has consistently maintained that it will give a commitment to cease military support to the Khmer Rouge, and support a ceasefire, only in the context of a comprehensive settlement agreed by all four Cambodian parties. The simple truth of the matter is that unless and until China is prepared to withdraw from the picture - and only the UN peace plan seems capable of delivering that - then whatever Australia and other countries choose to do, the continuation of bloody civil war is inevitable.

II. A second criticism made of the UN peace plan, or at least the protracted process involved in its negotiation, is that the delay in its implementation is being exploited by the Khmer Rouge to make major military gains and extend their political influence.

This criticism makes two assumptions, both of which lack foundation. The first is that there is an alternative, quicker way of achieving peace in Cambodia - but if the current international negotiating process were not taking place, there is simply no reason at all to assume that the Khmer Rouge's military activity would have been any less in recent months. The Australian initiative has not provided a smokescreen behind which the Khmer Rouge has fought - they have been fighting without encouragement from us for decades.

The other assumption, which needs to be addressed in more detail, is that the Khmer Rouge have in fact been making significant gains in recent months, and that there is as a result a real prospect of their regaining control of the country in the short to medium term. The media often carry exaggerated and unfounded accounts of Khmer Rouge advances, but the situation reflected in intelligence assessments available to the Australian Government is less dramatic. These assessments do indicate that the Khmer Rouge is making steady long-term progress with the same sort of guerilla strategy which brought it to power in 1975, but that there is no prospect of an early military takeover by the Khmer Rouge. The only exception made, and it is a very important one, is in the event of a total collapse in the military, political and social morale of the Hun Sen administration.

Recent media reports that the Khmer Rouge have recently received 24 Chinese tanks have, understandably, attracted wide attention. The Australian Government agrees with the view that, if such reports of recent delivery were true, they would indicate an ominous shift by China away from support for a comprehensive political settlement towards a military victory by the Khmer Rouge. But after full examination of, and consultation with our partners on, information from all sources, there is no evidence available to the Australian Government that the Khmer Rouge have recently received tanks from China. Indeed, the consensus among the experts is to the contrary. It is also worth noting that, while possession of tanks may give the Khmer Rouge some psychological advantage over the SOC, the logistic requirements to maintain, fuel and operate them, especially away from border areas, would stretch Khmer Rouge resources in current circumstances.

The SOC armed forces also have tanks and sufficient artillery to counter Khmer Rouge use of tanks. All along, the important question for the SOC has been their ability to use this hardware in a militarily effective way. Fighting has been limited in recent weeks, and casualties on both sides remain light. The pattern has been one of the SOC's maintaining static deployment against Khmer Rouge guerrilla harassment. There have been suggestions that the onset of the dry season from this month may see the SOC move to counter-offensive activity, but so far there are few indications of preparations for that.

It is certainly the view of the Australian Government that, to minimise any risk of significant change in the present military balance before the comprehensive settlement is bedded down, the current negotiating effort should be complemented by an immediate ceasefire and cessation of external arms supply. In this context we have been seeking support also for early despatch of a United Nations military "good offices" mission, to facilitate implementation of a period of military self-restraint.

While it is not the case that the SOC is facing any imminent disaster, it nonetheless has to be acknowledged that prospects of the SOC regime's surviving over the long term are not especially good if current trends inside Cambodia are allowed to continue. The long-term vulnerability of the SOC regime is compounded by chronic economic and administrative weaknesses. The regime has been heavily dependent on external assistance, particularly from the Soviet Union, but that is now being significantly reduced. The situation is exacerbated by Cambodia's very limited capacity to earn foreign exchange or to generate internal revenue. There are chronic shortages of basic necessities, particularly fuel. While the SOC has put in place measures to liberalise the economy, it has not developed adequate mechanisms to generate the income necessary to fund government services.

III. The third criticism is that once the UN peace plan is put into operation, the Khmer Rouge will be able to exploit the transitional arrangements to facilitate their return to power.

This is of course something which has been given very close attention in the international deliberations to date, and will no doubt continue to loom large in what remains of the negotiating process. The most important point to appreciate is that the SNC, while fully embodying the sovereignty of the Cambodian nation, is not expected to itself exercise the full range of executive authority that one would associate with an ordinary government. There is a sharp distinction in this respect between the SNC's role, and that proposed for the quadripartite transitional administration in the pre-November 1989 peace plan which implied a quarter-share in the day-to-day government of the country by Khmer Rouge officials. The presence of just two Khmer Rouge nominees within the body of 12 (or 14) constituting the SNC should not of itself cause concern, and is in fact readily accepted by the SOC regime.

Nor does the SOC regime, it should be said, resist the idea of letting the Khmer Rouge contest the UN-supervised elections provided Pol Pot and his most notorious associates are not allowed to stand as candidates. While it appears they are not in fact proposing to do so, in any case the United Nations and most relevant national governments including Australia would naturally refuse to cooperate with a process which was belittled by the presence of candidates of such notoriety. A further important election safeguard, proposed by Australia and accepted by other countries, is that the general elections organised by the United Nations should take place with secret balloting for a single national constituency with proportional representation. This will minimise the risk of intimidation of voters in areas controlled by the Khmer Rouge, for example.

More generally, of course, the whole concept of an enhanced UN role in the civil administration of the country during the transitional period is to ensure a genuinely neutral environment for the conduct of the election, in which no one party would stand to benefit by way of either assistance or neglect from a central government.

IV. A fourth criticism of the UN peace plan is that the Khmer Rouge will not in any event accept the final outcome of any process which does not leave them in control of the country.

It is difficult to believe that the Khmer Rouge would win more than a minor share of the vote in any genuinely free and fair election, although it would be unwise to underestimate the degree of support they have been winning - with their fiercely anti-Vietnamese nationalism and freedom from accusations of corruption - especially among some segments of the rural population who did not suffer directly their earlier brutality.

Certainly in these circumstances, given that there is no evidence that the Khmer Rouge's stated abandonment of their previous ideology and methods is anything more than tactical, there can be no guarantee that they will not resume fighting after the transitional period with weapons which have been hidden from the UN monitoring teams.

While acknowledging there can be no absolute guarantee that renewed fighting will not occur, two crucial new factors will have a positive bearing on the outcome. First, China will have given an international legal undertaking to cease arms supply to the Khmer Rouge, will be under close international scrutiny to uphold that undertaking, and can be reasonably expected to honour it. While the Khmer Rouge may well have access to two or three years supplies of arms in caches, and will be able to make a major nuisance of themselves during that time, thereafter - without continued external support - the danger they pose to the fabric of Cambodian society will be dramatically reduced. We can expect them to be genuinely isolated and marginalised.

A second relevant consideration is that the new Cambodian administration will be

accepted by the whole international community as the government of the country and is very likely to receive substantial economic, social and technical assistance during the rehabilitation and reconstruction process envisaged under the comprehensive settlement. Taken together, these factors will mean that the newly elected Cambodian Government will be in a much better position than the present Hun Sen regime to withstand any renewed challenge from what will be in any event a considerably constrained Khmer Rouge.

The Comprehensive Settlement Window

Taking stock of the current state of the peace process, it is apparent that there are two conflicting trends. On the one hand, following the successful fusion of the Permanent Five and Paris Conference components, there has now been prepared an integrated draft negotiating text for a comprehensive settlement. If the Cambodian parties and their international backers show the necessary political will, we should now be only a month or two away from a comprehensive settlement. On the other hand, the Cambodian parties are still unable to agree among themselves on the relatively minor - compared with other matters at stake - issue of the Chairmanship and Vice-Chairmanship of the SNC as established at the September Jakarta meeting. Not altogether unreasonably, the Paris Conference Co-Chairmen maintain the position that they will not reconvene the Paris Conference Co-ordination Committee until the Cambodian parties sort out the SNC impasse.

It would be a most unhappy result if the peace process were to break down at this late stage around this essentially very marginal issue. As already noted, it is not as though the SNC is intended to be a body with strong executive powers. Its role is intended to be largely formal. Throughout the transitional period, the SNC will be the unique source of authority and the embodiment of Cambodian independence, sovereignty and unity. Its role is to represent Cambodia externally and to delegate to the UN the powers necessary to ensure the implementation of the comprehensive settlement. But for China, Vietnam and all the Cambodian parties, it is increasingly clear that the SNC issue has now acquired considerable symbolic significance.

In late October and early November, Australia undertook a series of informal consultations in Phnom Penh, Hanoi, Beijing and Bangkok on the SNC impasse. We also consulted with Prince Sihanouk in Pyongyang. While it was clear that a deadlock might continue for some time, we encouraged the principal parties to consider a compromise formula whereby Prince Sihanouk would be elected as Chairman and a thirteenth member of the SNC, Prime Minister Hun Sen of the SOC regime would be elected Vice-Chairman, and the SOC would be invited to nominate someone to become a fourteenth member of the Council, with these arrangements being implemented either at clearly defined separate stages of a single meeting or at two successive meetings of the SNC. There are indications that something along these lines might eventually be acceptable to all the parties, but

disagreement for the time being persists.

In parallel with the continuing SNC impasse, there have been recent reports of dissatisfaction by the SOC regime and Vietnam with aspects of the Permanent Five framework of 28 August, as elaborated in Paris on 26 November 1990, including questions which relate to the administrative and military mandate for the proposed United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia. The continuing sensitivity of these issues has been known for some time. Australia's view is that the reported expressions of concern by the SOC and Vietnam confirm the urgency of resolving the SNC impasse quickly so that the Cambodian parties can address directly the substantive issues of the comprehensive settlement at a reconvened session of the Paris Conference Coordination Committee.

As I stated at the outset it is important for the Cambodian parties themselves to appreciate that the international community does not have infinite reservoirs of commitment and patience to provide to the peace process, particularly if the Cambodians themselves are not willing to help maintain forward momentum. There are indications that the commitment to the peace process of some of the key international players will be difficult to sustain much beyond the end of the year. The Gulf crisis and forthcoming major issues in Europe are likely increasingly to command the priority attention of most Permanent Five countries.

Taken together, these observations point to the conclusion that, while we are now much closer than we ever have been to reaching a comprehensive settlement of the Cambodian conflict, the window of opportunity for progress may well start to close around the end of this year. It is incumbent on Australia and other like-minded participants to give every possible support to the Paris Conference Co-Chairmen in the period immediately ahead so that, if possible, an unstoppable momentum towards a comprehensive settlement can be generated by the end of the year, even if the culminating Ministerial session on the Paris Conference has not taken place by then.

As I also indicated at the beginning of this statement, despite the efforts of Australia and many other players and despite all the progress made during the past year, it is still by no means certain that we will be able to achieve a comprehensive settlement of the Cambodian conflict. We should know one way or other during the next two months or so, as the parties are forced to come to grips with the actual obligations set out in the single negotiating text.

If it becomes clear that, despite the best efforts of all concerned, a comprehensive settlement is unachievable, Australia, along with other Western and regional countries, will need to review other policy options. It is very clear that any course other than a comprehensive settlement would be very much a second-best option. Diplomatic recognition and the moderate levels of economic assistance which might be forthcoming

over time would obviously help the SOC psychologically and to some extent practically. But the Khmer Rouge military threat, on the assumption of continuing arms supply from China, would remain a major challenge to the survival of the SOC regime. The internal weaknesses of the SOC regime, with all that they imply for its long-term vulnerability, could be expected to continue.

Given the sorry history of Western military involvement in Indo-China in recent decades, it would be a very large assumption that any future Australian government, or any future government in the West generally, would be willing to contemplate the despatch of military forces to help the SOC fight the Khmer Rouge. Certainly Vietnam has made it clear that it cannot afford to, and will not, play that role again. Up to 200,000 Vietnamese troops, fighting over a period of nearly 11 years, were not been able to eliminate the Khmer Rouge so long as it was supplied by China, and there is no reason to assume that anyone else would do as well.

The kind of alternative policy approach which is constantly recommended to the Government - built around recognition of the SOC - has, then, obvious limitations in helping save the ordinary Cambodian people from continuing civil war and the appalling prospect of a second military takeover by the Khmer Rouge. Nor can it be assumed that it will help in removing the Cambodian conflict as a source of international tension in the region.

Recognition of these realities strengthens the Australian Government in our conviction to do all in our capacity to help achieve a comprehensive settlement in the coming months. We are further reinforced in our commitment by the knowledge that Australia's diplomatic contribution to the solution of this deep-seated and complex problem has been welcomed and encouraged by the key international players in the negotiating process and all Cambodian parties except the Khmer Rouge. Just as importantly, Indonesia and other regional partners have welcomed the contribution we have made towards resolving an issue which has obstructed the harmonious development of relations in our region for over a decade.

Given all that has been achieved so far in the Cambodian peace process, and given the importance of the issues at stake - partly in terms of our own regional standing, but more importantly for the long-suffering Cambodian people - we do not intend to walk away from the effort to achieve a comprehensive settlement as long as there remains some reasonable prospect of success. While we may eventually have to consider other options if others allow the window of opportunity to once again slam shut, to do so now would be to demonstrate a lack of that nerve and stamina in foreign policy which is increasingly necessary in the ever-more fluid and uncertain international environment we now face.

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