

## AUSTRALIA, INDO-CHINA AND THE CAMBODIAN PEACE INITIATIVE

Address by the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Senator Gareth Evans, to Sydney Institute, Sydney, 13 March 1990.

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I have described elsewhere the story of Australia's relations with Indo-China as encapsulating, in many important ways, the story of Australian foreign policy - with nearly all the themes, aspirations, mistakes and shifts which characterise the broader narrative of our still evolving sense of place in the international scheme of things.

In the period before the Vietnam War, Indo-China - like a good deal of the rest of the world - was not really seen as engaging Australian interests at all, and our lack of interest in, and understanding of, the region was matched by an absence of policy towards it. In the Vietnam War period which followed, with its intense preoccupation with military security and the downward thrust of communism, there was, by contrast, a super-abundance of policy, most of it quite wrong-headed. Since the Vietnam War, beginning with the Whitlam period and with some sharp acceleration under the Hawke Government, our approach to Indo-China has involved a sharper appreciation of national interests, the projection of a very much more independent Australia image, a deepened commitment to international cooperation and multilateral processes, and a real determination to intensify Australia's regional foreign policy focus.

In the evolution of our relations with South East Asia generally, the contrasts have not been quite so strongly etched as with Indo-China, but the main strands are still there: ignorance and indifference, followed by a preoccupation with military security, and now an emphasis on nurturing a genuinely multi-dimensional set of relationships. Indo-China has been a touchstone of both how we are perceived by our Asian neighbourhood, and how that region perceives us.

Certainly Indo-China, and the way that we have handled ourselves there, has itself been a frame of reference through which South East Asia sees Australia. It has been, and remains, a very important factor in our relations with ASEAN, and in the past has been the cause of some friction in those relations. It is an issue which is central to the stability of South East Asia, and how we approach Indo-China is seen to reflect on our attitudes towards regional security issues more generally. In short, the way in which we handle or mishandle our policy towards Indo-China continues to carry important implications for Australia's broader relations in the region.

Australia's current efforts to achieve a Cambodian settlement need to be understood against this background. They are part of a larger picture, in the same way that the Cambodian problem itself has implications which stretch well beyond Indo-China. Cambodia may be a regional issue, but it is also one which touches the interests of many outside the region, including the superpowers, and China and France. It has in the past acted as a brake on closer ties between the Soviet Union and China. It has been a major element in US policy towards South East Asia. It has been the central theme around which ASEAN political cooperation has been forged, and in Australia it has been a major foreign policy concern and a high profile domestic issue for over a decade.

Why Australia is involved. Before going into the details of what Australia is doing to facilitate a Cambodian settlement I want to say something about why we are doing it. The first reason, and in foreign policy this must always take precedence, is that important national interests of our own are involved. While the war in Cambodia continues, it is the single greatest source of instability in the region. It feeds tensions and hostility between regional countries who could and should be friends. It draws in the great powers and perpetuates divisions between them, and those who support them: divisions which in Europe are fast fading.

While the war continues, the great potential of our region for new levels of economic cooperation and development can be only partially fulfilled. And while the war continues, refugee flows within and beyond the region will continue, confronting the countries of the region and those beyond it with major moral, economic and social problems.

Secondly we have, as a nation which aspires to be a good international citizen, an uncomplicated humanitarian obligation to help resolve the tragedy that has engulfed Cambodia. The people of Cambodia have been caught up in an external war not of their making; in a period of unimaginable internal horror; and in an external invasion that has brought with it further years of fighting, hunger and suffering. All the countries of the world owe the Cambodian people peace: to rebuild their country, their own lives and some kind of decent future for their children.

Thirdly, I have a strong belief that those countries, including Australia, which helped to bring all-out war to Indo-China do have a particular responsibility now to help create a durable peace there. I am not suggesting that the Australian Governments of the time, let alone Australians who fought in the Vietnam War, were directly responsible for what has happened in Cambodia. Of course they were not. But just as this country and my generation of Australians helped, by our involvement in the Vietnam War, to create the conditions for the Cambodian tragedy - albeit indirectly and unwittingly - we now have a responsibility to help create the conditions for a lasting Cambodian peace.

This is no eleventh hour conversion. The current Australian initiative should be seen in the

context of a long standing involvement by this Government in the search for a Cambodian settlement. It should also, to be fair, be seen in the context of some early initiatives by the Fraser Government, which responded sharply (with the support of the then Labor Opposition) to Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia in late 1978, and which in 1980 derecognised the ousted Khmer Rouge Government and in so doing broke ranks with ASEAN, which had been sponsoring that government's cause in the United Nations.

My predecessor, Bill Hayden, was extremely active on the Cambodian issue in the mid 1980s, making a very real contribution to the quality and level of international debate, and imparting a sense of urgency to the effort to find a solution. He succeeded in having Australia accepted by the international community, including ASEAN, as a responsible and knowledgeable voice. Our views during this period may not always have been welcomed by all the parties - when those views went to such issues as the co-sponsorship of the annual ASEAN resolution at the UN, or a possible war crimes tribunal to try Pol Pot and his associates (which the Opposition has now made the centrepiece of its own Cambodian policy: at a time, however, when no government with whom I have tested the idea believes it is practicable or would be helpful). But Bill Hayden's views were given weight and taken into account, and are now appreciated for their contribution to the process of finding peace. They kept the issue very much alive at a time when many were all too content for it to quietly die.

The Australian Initiative. These earlier efforts helped prepare the ground for the current more structured and detailed Australian initiative. That initiative was born in the aftermath of the failure of the Paris Conference on Cambodia last August to make the progress which we had all hoped would be possible following the announcement by Vietnam of its intention to withdraw its forces from Cambodia, and some positive developments in a regional context at the Indonesian-sponsored Jakarta Informal Meeting (JIM) talks.

Attended by participants from nineteen countries - the JIM group (comprising the four Cambodian Parties, the six ASEAN countries, and Vietnam and Laos) together with the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, four other "interested" countries (Australia, Canada, India and Japan) and Zimbabwe as the current chairman of the Non-Aligned Movement - the Paris Conference did identify the broad parameters of a comprehensive settlement. This involved 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.

This settlement strategy foundered for a number of reasons - including the insistence of Vietnam and Hun Sen on there being references in the conference documentation to the Khmer Rouge's genocide, and the Khmer Rouge's reciprocal insistence on references to the presence of many Vietnamese settlers in the country. But there was only one substantive issue that 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 KR, in the transitional administration; but this was a demand which the PRK government of Hun Sen, and its international backers, was not prepared to concede.

As the months after Paris ticked away, positions seemed to harden rather than soften, fighting broke out again on the ground with the coming of the dry season, and various efforts to advance the issue by the Paris Conference Co-Chairmen, the Thai Prime Minister and the US Secretary of State all failed to produce results. It was against this background, and following some exploratory discussions with some of my Foreign Ministerial colleagues at the UN in November, with the PRK Deputy Prime Minister Kong Som Ol during his visit to Australia, and in particular with US Congressman Stephen Solarz, that I developed the view that a way through the impasse might be found by retaining the goal of a comprehensive settlement, but focussing squarely on the issue which had most divided the Paris Conference - the nature of the transitional administration.

The central idea was a very simple one: instead of continuing the futile search for some kind of power-sharing formula acceptable to the four Cambodian Parties, we should instead seek to directly involve the United Nations in the administration of Cambodia during that period, subject to an appropriate change in the status of the Cambodian seat in the United Nations. This idea was put into the public domain by an answer in the Senate on 24 November last. As I said then:

Such an agreement 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.

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.

It became quickly apparent that the proposal had considerable appeal in the court of public opinion in Australia (and, it seemed likely, in the other Western democracies as well), not least in its avoidance of any executive role for the Khmer Rouge. But what we anticipated less was the extent to which, and speed with which, the idea was picked up, and given varying degrees of public endorsement, by just about all the parties to the Paris talks.

In early December I had tasked a Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Deputy Secretary, Mike Costello, to pay a quick visit to Hanoi - in between talks scheduled on other matters in Hawaii and Tokyo - to get a preliminary read-out: 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-January period - a remarkable feat of diplomatically effective endurance.

During the course of the Costello odyssey, the Australia '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.

By late January, the Indonesian Co-Chairman of the Paris Conference, Foreign Minister Ali Alatas, was sufficiently encouraged by the reception the Australian proposal was receiving - including at an exploratory meeting of the Permanent 5 powers in Paris in mid-January - to set about convening, as a prelude to a fully resumed Paris Conference meeting, a regional "Informal Meeting on Cambodia (IMC)" - to be attended basically by the JIM cast, but under Paris auspices, and with Australia to be also invited as a 'resource delegation'.

Flushed with this responsibility, I and my Departmental task force - by now numbering over a dozen senior officers - drove ourselves to new levels of intense activity and, with major input from a technical mission we sent to Cambodia for 10 days in mid-February, completed a 154-page set of Working Papers in time for distribution to the Conference which convened in Jakarta on 26 February. This volume is now universally referred to as the "Red Book" (or "Big Red Book" to distinguish it from another well known member of this genre).

I made clear to the Jakarta Meeting that, despite the success of the Australian initiative in breaking the diplomatic logjam, and in getting people talking again, Australia did not think of itself as a party principal to the dispute - and certainly did not seek to usurp the role or prerogatives of the French and Indonesian Co-Chairmen, of ASEAN, of the Permanent 5 countries, or indeed of the UN - which had to decide for itself, through the Secretary-General, the Security Council and the General Assembly, what it would be prepared to do.

Our Working Papers were a resource document, no more and no less - designed to demonstrate that there were practical and realistic ways of reaching a comprehensive settlement that would not cause damage to anyone's rights or interests. They set out options, not concluded preferences, and did not constitute a negotiating text (although we did sketch out, in one of the Supplementary Papers, what the shape of a formal negotiating

text might look like - to impress upon participants the size of the task ahead!). Generally, I told the Jakarta Conference - and this remains my text - that Australia saw ourselves not as driving the process, but playing the part, as it were, of map-maker - identifying the places we would all like to get to, and finding ways of getting there that had not been previously fully explored.

It is true that, by Jakarta, the map had evolved, in its detail and complexity, a long way from the original November sketch plan. On the central question of the UN role in the administration of Cambodia in the transitional period, the Papers set out in detail all the ways through this question which had been raised with us over the past three months. They examined the many questions about how each option would work in practice, how many people would be required to make it work, and what its cost would be. They also looked at what else would be required to establish that environment of confidence which was an essential precondition of an effective settlement: matters such as the electoral process; the structure and operation of military security; the establishment of a Supreme National Council in which Cambodian national sovereignty would be embodied and national unity symbolised in the transitional period; the commitments required by Cambodia and the international community to ensure that the new Cambodia would be genuinely independent and neutral; and the principles and procedures to apply to the reconstruction of the Cambodian nation.

The Jakarta Meeting. In the event, the Jakarta Meeting failed. The Vietnamese, and Hun Sen, insisted - as at Paris last year - that any final agreed record make reference to "the prevention of recurrence of genocidal practices", and the Khmer Rouge - inevitably - resisted this. Last minute attempts at compromise - to keep all the words, but allow participants to disassociate themselves from those they could not accept - also failed, and the meeting broke up without any document being endorsed.

But on all the matters of substance addressed in the Australian Working Papers - the essential principles of an eventual settlement - the Jakarta Meeting made significant progress, and in very large part on the basis of the concepts outlined in our Working Papers.

One of the major achievements of the Australian role in Jakarta was to show that the idea of UN involvement in all the key aspects of a comprehensive settlement is not just a fantasy, but can be a practical reality; to show that it can be done in a sensible and affordable way, and that it can be done in a way which is also fair to all the Cambodian parties. Put simply, our papers silenced the sceptics.

By any measure the points of agreement reached in Jakarta, albeit not recorded as such,

were significant. There was agreement about the basic objectives of the settlement exercise; agreement about an enhanced role for the UN in the transitional period with its role specifically in relation to civil administration to be the subject of further negotiation; agreement on the establishment of a Supreme National Council, embodying the nations sovereignty, which could occupy the seat of Cambodia at the United Nations upon achievement of a comprehensive settlement; agreement on the need for a UN mandate for a supervision, monitoring and verification role covering the withdrawal of foreign troops, the cessation of external arms supplies, and a ceasefire to provide a secure environment for elections; agreement that the UN should organise and conduct free and fair elections; agreement on the need for arrangements for the release and exchange of prisoners of war and civilian internees, and the repatriation and rehabilitation of refugees and displaced persons, as well as the reconstruction of Cambodia in accordance with the principles agreed at Paris.

There was also agreement that there should be formal commitments recognising, endorsing and guaranteeing Cambodian sovereignty, independence, neutrality and non-alignment. And there was agreement that any elected Cambodian government should respect internationally endorsed principles and standards of human rights.

We should also take some heart from the generally positive atmosphere of the Jakarta meeting, much of it owing to the outstanding efforts of the Chairman, my friend and colleague Ali Alatas, the Foreign Minister of Indonesia. The ASEAN delegations made a real effort to encourage agreement among the Cambodian factions, and I was also personally impressed with the generally constructive positions adopted by Prince Ranariddh and Son Sann, and for the most part, by Hun Sen.

The failure of the meeting to agree on a concluding statement because of a disagreement on whether or not to include a reference to genocide was frustrating. But it does not negate the progress which was made. Cambodia is probably the most complex single problem in international affairs at the moment. We should not be too discouraged by the fact that Jakarta ended without a dramatic breakthrough. We have known all along that we are dealing with an incremental process, a long and gruelling test of endurance. It should be remembered that it was only last August that two of the principal actors absolutely denied the possibility of international action in Cambodia under UN auspices. Seen from this perspective, Jakarta was a major step forward. It was a considerable advance on the Paris Conference and it confirmed that if there is to be a way forward, it must be by the UN route.

What next? In all of this time is both our opponent and our ally. We cannot let the momentum of the last few months slip away, but we must also hope that the exhaustion

factor - so crucial to the settlement of drawn out disputes - will lead to results. I remain convinced that a settlement is within our grasp, but if the Paris Conference is to resume within a reasonable time frame we will need to see more progress on several fronts.

Much is going to depend on whether the Permanent 5 members of the Security Council - in their meeting this week in Paris and in subsequent meetings - can pick up and continue to run with the issue in the constructive way that they have so far. China's role in particular remains crucial. If a way can be found to convince China to cease its support for the Khmer Rouge then the pressure on the Khmer Rouge to join a political settlement will be immense. That pressure is already growing, which is one reason why the Khmer Rouge for the first time agreed in Jakarta to discuss our proposal. But it is not yet great enough to stop them playing, at the margins, the sort of wrecking role they played in Jakarta.

The Khmer Rouge ought to reflect on the fact that, at the end of the day, nobody is too disposed to give them a right of veto over a settlement. If they do not come on board, then in the circumstances I have just mentioned, they face standing out against the whole weight of international opinion, and going it alone in an environment where they are being denied external support from their traditional friends and allies.

Vietnam, the PRK (or the SOC, as Hun Sen's administration is now called) and others too can do more to achieve a settlement. We all understand the depth of emotion which lies behind the arguments about genocide and other despicable practices of the Khmer Rouge. No one has the right to ask the victims of terror to forget the past. But if peace is to come to Cambodia there comes a point when everyone has to look forward rather than to the past. Room has to be created by each warring party for the others to move to the table. The alternative is a continuation of misery and tragedy.

This is a point Vietnam and the other parties principal must accept if we are to have a settlement. I have made it clear that the resumption of government to government aid

to Vietnam is contingent on a comprehensive settlement on Cambodia being in place or at least in prospect. In the meantime, we will of course continue to provide humanitarian and other basic assistance to Vietnam through international agencies and through non-government organisations; assistance which in the last financial year was of the order of \$21 million.

Just as we ask others to redouble their efforts on a settlement, so also do we intend to continue to play an active role, refining our maps as necessary, doing what we can to maintain the momentum, and encouraging all the parties to explore solutions. Australia is one of the very few countries that can speak effectively to all the players, and virtually all of them have made it clear that they wish us to continue our efforts. As the action shifts to the Permanent 5 and elsewhere our own role will no doubt be less prominent than over the



last few months. But we will continue to plug away as an objective generator of ideas and of detailed proposals, and as a facilitator of dialogue.

Australia's Place in the Region. I commented at the start on the way in which our approach towards Indo-China feeds into a complex range of perceptions about Australia's overall place in the region. I would like to conclude with some general observations about the current shape of those perceptions. The last twelve months has been a period of extraordinary activity in Australia's foreign and trade policy. We enter the 1990s with a diplomacy that has very much come of age; a diplomacy with a sharpened sense of what a middle sized nation can achieve in our region and beyond.

It is a diplomacy based not on some inflated sense of influence or power but on a commitment to use our resources sensibly and creatively to try to find solutions that have eluded others. One of the features of our Cambodian initiative is that the way in which it has been pursued has been at least as crucial to its success as its substance.

Its two central themes - an enhanced role for the UN, and the tackling of the UN seat issue - were not especially new: the former had been canvassed by Congressman Solarz and indeed, a decade earlier, by Prince Sihanouk, while a number of lobby groups had long been suggesting that the UN seat issue was not a subsidiary one but in fact the key to unlocking the whole conflict.

What enabled the proposal to break the diplomatic ice were essentially its packaging (linking together the two central themes, and doing so squarely within the framework of the ASEAN-sponsored concept of a comprehensive settlement); its timing (with the diplomatic impasse post-Paris well established, growing public concerns about the role of the Khmer Rouge in any interim arrangement being expressed, and a well-founded fear about the imminent unleashing of a new round of bloodshed on the ground in Cambodia); and last but no means least the energy with which it was pursued. It has also been, moreover, a fine example of team work between a very professional Department of Foreign Affairs working very closely and productively with its Minister in the development and implementation of a major policy initiative.

This professional approach and performance - with a sharp eye for timing and packaging - has been by no means restricted to the Cambodia issue. It has been a feature of virtually all our major international initiatives of recent times - on Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), on Antarctica, on Chemical Weapons, in the Cairns Group, on financial sanctions against apartheid, and on Cambodia - with the result that it is no exaggeration to say that today Australia cuts quite a significant and respected figure on the international, and especially the Asia Pacific regional, stage.

Along the way we have witnessed important changes both in how we view the region and

in how the region views us. The

days when Australia looked out on the region with the eyes of a cultural exile are fast fading. We are more comfortable with the diversity of those around us. We worry less about our distance from our cultural roots. And within the region, we are seen today as a natural participant in regional discussions; a country with a legitimate interest in regional developments; and a nation which seeks to play a constructive and creative role in regional affairs.

All this contributes to our capacity to pursue the many important national interests we have in the region and beyond. On the Cambodia issue, it lends credibility to our efforts and an easy acceptance of our good faith. It is a role we are determined to continue. Indo-China has been the graveyard of many delusions. It must not be allowed to become the cemetery of peace.

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