

Anika Begum

THE UN PEACE PLAN AND PROSPECT FOR PEACE IN CAMBODIA

A mainland country in Southeast Asian region, Cambodia (also known as Kampuchea) has been cursed by twenty five years' of state of war that commenced with the ouster of the former Head of State, Prince Norodom Sihanouk. Cambodians have been shedding blood in phases under Lon Nol's rule, Pol Potist genocidal regime, Vietnamese military occupation. Even after the pullout of the Vietnamese troops the bloodshed continues as internal feuding goes on in this ravaged country. In addition to the loss of huge human lives, the physical destructions have left the country in debris. As peace remains elusive, outflow of refugees continues unabated posing significant political challenge to the international community.

A number of peace proposals has been put forward to reach a political solution that can bring about peace in the war-torn country. Peace efforts have gone through on arduous process on occasions with some positive dimensions but could not draw a fullproof framework for the Cambodians to embrace peace. Hopes were raised with the formulation of the peace plan by the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council or "Big Five". Previously there had

been numerous discussions, debate, consultations, circulation of specific ideas, adoption of resolutions in the United Nations (UN) regarding this case. In late August, 1990, the "Big Five" stepped up with a total plan that would bring lasting peace and stability to the country. While under the auspices of the UN other major issues of regional conflicts like Iran-Iraq war, independence of Namibia etc. were dealt with successfully, the international community also anticipated similar success in case of Cambodia. At the initial stage the prospect for peace in view of the plan seemed potent with the approbation of the plan by four warring factions but as time has ticked away the whole set has turned out complex, to some extent wiping out hope for peace. This article intends to make a study of factors impeding a peaceful solution of the crisis and indicate the prospects of the same. The first part briefly examines the UN peace proposal and the context in which the proposal was accepted by the parties. The second part deals with the main impediments in the peace process, particularly in the context of the UN proposal. Finally some concluding observations are made.

I

Endeavours to end the civil war of Cambodia started before the pullout of the Vietnamese troops in September 1989 and continued in a chequered process that is still on. Many peace talks have been held but foundered without framing the way to achieve the goal at the first stage mainly on the issue of participation of Khmer Rouge, a resistance faction and on the role of an international mechanism in Cambodia. Though some broad parameters of a settlement have been drawn out of those talks, these were not successful largely because of specific framework of proposal to

end the fighting and establish peace. The process nevertheless continued.

The UN has always been deeply concerned about the situation evolving in Cambodia. Its peace efforts however took concrete shape when the "Big Five" jointly proposed their plan on 28th August, 1990. The Five who have also been supporters of one faction or another in the conflict, after six rounds of talks unanimously reached on a comprehensive plan which is widely expected to bring peace and stop country's civil war.

The plan stipulates : (1) transitional arrangements regarding administration of Cambodia during the pre-election period, in other words the formation of an interim government; (2) military arrangements for the transitional period; (3) UN supervised elections; (4) protection of human rights and (5) international guarantees for a neutral Cambodia. All these imply a massive role for the UN. An essential element of the plan is to ensure that the people of Cambodia to determine their own political future through free and fair elections organised and conducted by the UN in a neutral political environment with full respect for the national sovereignty of Cambodia. The warring factions have been called upon to accept the plan as the basis for a comprehensive settlement of the problem. The plan envisaged the formation as early as possible of a National Supreme Council (SNC) composed of representatives of the resistance factions and the government of Hun Sen. It also provided that subject to approbation of the Cambodians and the Security Council, a "UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC)" will be established which would organise elections.

A breakthrough was made with the acceptance of the "Big Five" plan by the four warring factions as a framework document to bring peace in Cambodia. At an informal meeting in Jakarta under the joint chairmanship of Indonesia and France on September 10, 1990, all the four factions expressed their commitment to accept a UN role in administering the country before the elections and to elaborate the framework into a comprehensive political settlement. They also reached a consensus to set up a twelve member SNC. For Khmer Rouge, the acceptance of the plan made it a party in the peace process of Cambodia and in the interim arrangement and in the final political settlement. On the other hand Khmer Rouge's acceptance implied a retreat from the total military victory the faction has aimed for.¹ For the Phnom Penh government, however, it was a difficult choice to accept the plan as it implied sharing of power it had been enjoying. Assurances from respective external patrons were however important in this connection as reports suggested that "insecurities about the SNC were equalled by guarantees provided by Washington."² On the other hand, two non-communist factions spontaneously recognized the plan. To these militarily non-significant parties representation on the SNC has been a great achievement.

The formulation of the Five's plan itself may be regarded as a breakthrough. For the first time the principal backers of the various Cambodian factions have signed the plan. The backers who have been supporting one or another factions have shown flexibility which helped acceptance of the plan by the feuding parties. A major part has been contributed by the normalization of relations between some actors of the Cambodian conflict. Important among them is the

1. *Far Eastern Economic Review* (FEER) September 13, 1990, p. 9.

2. *FEER*, September 2, 1990, p. 11.

relatively relaxed relation between China and Vietnam, who have been supporting the Khmer Rouge and the Phnom Penh government known to be the militarily dominant factions. A secret summit between the top party and government leaders of these two countries held on 3-4 September, 1990 where differences over Cambodia have been sorted out between them has been perceived to be a step towards normalization of relation since Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia in December, 1978.³ It is believed that a better understanding between them has helped convince Hun Sen to attend the meeting in the first place and accept the Khmer Rouge in the SNC.⁴ A realization of Vietnam that there can be no solution to Cambodian problem without China has made Hun Sen agreeable to the peace plan. Perhaps the end of cold war and change in socialist system in East Europe has removed much of the reasons for China and Vietnam's estrangement.⁵

Chinese flexibility over Cambodia has indeed been seen at the beginning of August. The suppression of pro-democratic demonstration in Tienanmen Square in June, 1989 with an iron hand put China in an isolation in the international community, particularly, the western world. China has been trying to come out of that situation as the Chinese leadership also recognized that diplomatic isolation since that event have done more harm than good.⁶ One attempt has been demonstrated through a softening in Chinese stand as it expressed desire to gradually reduce and eventually stop the military aid to the Khmer Rouge with an eye to normalize relation with the West. Apart from that a meeting held between the Chinese and Soviet delega-

3. *Asiaweek*. September, 28, 1990, p. 43.

4. *FEER*. September 20, 1990, p. 11.

5. *FEER*. October 4, 1990, p. 13.

6. *FEER*. September 20, 1990, p. 11.

tion shortly before the Jakarta meeting seemed to make a thaw of some degree in their relationship that could be related to concurrence of the Five's peace plan.

The dramatic US shift on 18th July, 1990 revealing its decision of direct talks with both Phnom Penh government and its Vietnamese communist patron was very significant. It acted as a catalyst for Vietnam in pressing Hun Sen in the peace negotiating process. Currently, Vietnam had been passing through a period of economic crisis that threatened the survival of the country. It was receiving signals of aid-cut from East Europe and particularly Soviet Union which provided more than 75% of Phnom Penh's operating budget.⁷ Vietnam was further handicaped by the economic embargo imposed by the non-communist countries, mainly West, since the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia. Inside the country liberals have been seeking a way out of the crisis by opening a door to the West. An announcement of Bush administration that a Cambodian settlement would remove the last stumbling block to normalization of relation between the US and Vietnam encouraged to put pressure on Phnom Penh accept the Five's plan. Vietnam's hope to be rewarded however was not realised as US did not withdraw the restriction, rather extended it for one more year.⁸

II

Implementation of the "Big Five" peace plan soon ran into complications. An essential aspect of the complexities was that it has been hard to harmonize between what was designed in the plan and what was

7. *FEER*, July 5, 1990, p. 44.

8. *Ibid.*

needed to be done to reach the goal. Some problems that impeded the process of implementation of the plan are discussed below.

a) Complexities regarding the SNC

The SNC is to be the legislative body on which the independence, sovereignty and unity of Cambodia would be vested upon during the transitional period before elections are held. The issue of formation of the council as well as the participation of the Khmer Rouge in peace process remained a source of contention for quite some time.

Khmer Rouge is the name of an extreme communist faction of Cambodia which is viewed by the people of the country with most antipathy and fear. It is because of their brutal record they made during their rule from April 1975 to December 1978. After the dispossession of Prince Norodom Sihanouk by his Prime Minister Lon Nol in March 1970, the Prince went into a marriage of convenience with the Khmer Rouge in a bid to procure Chinese favour. Subsequent upon the toppling of the regime of Lon Nol in April 1975, the Pol Potians, i.e. the Khmer Rouge took over power keeping Sihanouk in the status of Head of State while virtually all power was retained by the Pol Pot Clique.⁹ Outright atrocity was the main trait of the regime. Assistance from China with whom the Khmer Rouge was very close, made them militarily powerful. The Khmer Rouge brought a reign of terror inside the country which was eventually brought to an end with the invasion of Cambodia by Vietnam in December 1978. The memories of terror under Pol Pot have

9. G. P. Ramachandra, *Kampuchea, An Artificial Problem in International Relations* (Calcutta: Best Books, 1/A, College Row, 1986), p. 14.

been too strong to accept the return of the same clique in the political process of Cambodia.

But the Khmer Rouge has been actively involved in Cambodian affairs. They joined hands with Son Sann, Leader of the Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF) and Prince Sihanouk, leader of Movement pour la Liberation National du Kampuchea (MOULINAKA) in the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK) in 1982. KPNLF and MOULINAKA are non-communist groups. The Khmers became a partner of the other two factions in the Coalition in the struggle against Vietnamese occupation. Also their performance in the battlefield was better than the other two as patron China provided active help like supplying arms, ammunitions, financial assistance as well as training, shelter etc.

Many peace talks have foundered on the question of Khmer Rouge's return to power. Particularly the present Phnom Penh government of Hun Sen has been holding the strong position against its inclusion. It is mainly the Khmer Rouge with whom the government forces have been fighting. After the Vietnamese pull-out with gradual intensification of fighting between the two sides it has shown greater mobility and manoeuvrability which contributed in capturing large territories compounding the concerns of Hun Sen.

The Paris Talk held on 30th August, 1989 identified the broad parameters for a comprehensive settlement including the setting up of a transitional administration. Again due to the vehement opposition by Premier Hun Sen to the Khmer Rouge participation the conference faced deadlock. The Khmer Rouge has demanded equal representation in the future framework of Cambodia. Hun Sen has maintained that if they are entertained with even a tiny piece of power, they would be more encouraged to hold complete control

which could lead to a bloodbath of millions of Cambodians. Hun Sen has held the view that those responsible for killing more than one million of Cambodians could not be perceived to be a partner in an administration.

An Australian peace plan has been proposed on 23rd November, 1989 called for "the establishment of a Supreme National Council for Cambodia to be the unique legislative body and source of authority in which national sovereignty and unity should be enshrined in the transitional period."¹⁰ The road ahead to set up the SNC has been difficult. The Tokyo talk has marked progress towards an agreement to set up the SNC with representation from four warring factions as Hun Sen has been flexible to permit the Khmer Rouge to seat in the negotiating table. But the agreement lost significance because the Khmer Rouge leaders Khieu Samphan walked out of the talk. The reason behind his withdrawal has been the refusal of his demand composition of the proposed SNC having five members from the Phnom Penh government and five from each of the three resistance factions while the rest agreed to approve six representative from the former and six from the resistance coalition. It was decided in Tokyo talk by the two non-communist groups and Hun Sen that the formation of the SNC has to be on the basis of participation of two governments (Hun Sen's and the coalitions'). The Tokyo Talk made it clear that the Khmer Rouge are unfortunately necessary component part for peace making in Cambodia.

The latest phase of the peace process has embraced the "Big Five" peace plan. It has endorsed a crucial role for the Council. In Jakarta meeting on September 10, 1990 an agreement has been reached by the four

10. *Australian Foreign Affairs and Trade*, The Monthly Record (Canberra, Australia, March 1990), No. 3, Vol. 61, p. 144.

warring factions to adopt the plan. They have adopted the six plus six formula. Also China and Vietnam have agreed that this formula would be accepted by Vietnam and it would allow the Khmer Rouge to be formally represented.¹¹ This represents a success in the peace process as it has been possible to harmonize the four factions despite their different shades of opinion. The composition of the Council which seemed to be most debatable has been agreed upon. Also the SNC has been a result of a long negotiating process which has helped to realize that diplomatic efforts have brought some fruits.

But the contention resumed around the issue who would chair the Council. A suggestion has been made by the Five to elect a chairman as soon as possible. In fact they have been considering a special role for Sihanouk on the SNC.¹² Though welcomed by the resistance coalition this consideration has triggered a conflicting situation around them. Hun Sen has been reluctant to allow one more member for the council from the opposition coalition which would tilt the balance to their side. At the first session of the Council convened in Bangkok on September 17, 1990, the resistance factions have demanded that Sihanouk be appointed chairman and occupy the seat of the thirteenth member of the SNC. This proposal has been refused by Hun Sen stating that the two seats granted to his own party can provide his membership, not adding another one. Subsequently another idea has been raised that presents an additional representative of the Phnom Penh government balancing Sihanouk's presence as chairman.¹³ It may be mentioned that China who has endorsed the peace plan has been

11. *Asiaweek*, September 28, 1990, p. 43.

12. *FEER*, September 13, 1990, p. 8.

13. *FEER*, October 4, 1990, p. 12.

nonetheless backing their clients by rejecting Hun Sen's Vice-Chairmanship of the SNC.¹⁴

The "Big Five" have agreed in Paris in late November, 1990 on details for comprehensive settlement which is a twelve-page document, also five annexes and two further separate documents. They have also appealed to the constestant parties to stop quarelling over organizational structure of the SNC and to make it a functional reality.¹⁵ By mid-December one decision has raised the hope for progress towards a settlement of Cambodian conflict. This was the resolution "to put aside for now the issue of which of them should chair the SNC."¹⁶

b) The interest of the present government

The present government of Phnom Penh like any other incumbent regime would desire and try to continue in power. That is why it has tried to minimize the influence of the Khmer Rouge from the peace process whom the course of fighting has been favouring. This has been manifested on many occassions during the whole peace process. The government's main concern was to keep itself in power. Hun Sen, the primier, has been intransigent in allowing any sort of international role. In Paris peace talks Hun Sen rejected a role of the UN in Cambodia because of its recognition of the three-party resistance coalition. Also an international control mechanism has been unacceptable due to the ambiguity of the form it might take and the scope of the task involved. Instead, Phnom Penh has suggested for a resurrection of the

14. *FEER*, December 6, 1990, p. 22.

15. *Ibid.*

16. *The Economist*, December 22, 1990, p. 26.

International Control Commission (ICC) which had overseen the second Indochina war from 1954-75.¹⁷ Also when Australia came forward with peace plan whose basis has been 'an enhanced role of the UN,' Phnom Penh did not approve it. Hun Sen declared its readiness to accept the verdict of the people in free and fair elections held under the auspices of the UN, no matter what the outcome is, but it did not agree to dismantle his government during the UN transitional administration simultaneously with the CGDK headed by Prince Sihanouk. He has justified the refusal by arguing that the moment the government is abolished, nation-wide insecurity and chaos would appear and the situation would create the opportunity which would be picked up by the Khmer Rouge to snatch power. Again in Tokyo talk Hun Sen has shown firm attitude on allowing UN administration not by replacing its own government.

The "Big Five" plan has been welcomed by Cambodia's Deputy Prime Minister Hor Nam Hong who mentioned "Cambodia accepts a major role played by the United Nations during the transitional period, notably the right to organize free and equitable general elections."¹⁸ This time also Phnom Penh has remained vague on the role of the UN as it did not elaborate whether it pledges to give over its power or wants parallel administration during interim arrangements. Moreover, as Cambodia's President and Communist Party General Secretary Heng Samrin insisted, his government's position has been to "maintain its status quo, both politically and militarily,"¹⁹ which again reflects long standing willingness of continuing the

17. *Asian Survey* (Berkeley, California : University of California Press, January 1990), Vol. XXX, No. 1, p. 98-99.

18. *FEER*, September 13, 1990, p. 9.

19. *Ibid.*

rule of Cambodia by the present government. When the four factions have met in Jakarta where they have accepted the Five's plan as the framework for total peace, the Phnom Penh government floated the idea of continuing its own administration to run the country until elections.²⁰ Hun Sen even affirmed that power would not be handed over to UN mechanism before election.²¹

This issue has become more complex with little changed posture of one member of "Big Five"—the Soviet Union which like Vietnam appears to be softly favouring the continuation of the Hun Sen administration in Cambodia. In Jakarta France was questioned by the Soviet Union for omitting recognition of the existing administrative structures in Cambodia from its proposal.²² It seemed to indicate the unwillingness to agree to dissolution of the Phnom Penh government before elections though it was a party who has formulated the UN peace plan. Vietnam also sounded similar despite the decision of both China and Vietnam to encourage the Five's plan for achieving peace for Cambodia. Vietnamese foreign minister Nguyen Co Thach has revealed that this plan deals with the internal issues of Cambodia and constitutes a violation of the goal and principles of the UN Charter concerning the sovereignty of UN member countries.²³ Hun Sen government who got into accommodation with the resistance coalition in the SNC maintained "these people (opposition coalition) have tried to drag the United Nations into going along with their dirty goal to the extent of grossly violating the UN Char-

20. *Asiaweek*, September 21, 1990, p. 22.

21. *The Economist*, December 1, 1990, p. 28.

22. *FEER*, November 22, 1990, p. 23.

23. *The Economist*, December 22, 1990, p. 26.

24. *Ibid.*

ter."²⁴ These also indicate the reluctance to the recognition of UN role in Cambodia.

c) Problem regarding military arrangement

The lack of substantial progress about military arrangements which includes a cease fire, arms give up and driving away the foreign troops is regarded an obstacle in implementing Five's peace plan. There has been continuous fighting between the government forces and resistance coalition. During the period after the Vietnamese withdrawal all the warring factions got down in a competition to win the test of fortitude and to buy the battle-tested credibility. In the process Khmer Rouge has continuously grabbed Cambodian territory, specially major provincial towns as much as possible, so that they would be in a position to put pressure on Hun Sen's government to include them in an interim government. With the least tangible breakthroughs in the peace process, each faction has been trying to come out with trump card, i.e. territorial control bargainable in an eventual election. The factions have been aided militarily by their respective external backers. Since the initial phase of the peace effort, there have been persistent calls to arrange a ceasefire but all efforts have gone in vein. Initially all four parties agreed upon a cease fire plan in response to a previous Thai call of self-restraint, but it did not sustain. Rather the Khmer Rouge doubled their war-activity since the US policy shift. The US which has been backing the resistance coalition appeared with a new face, revealing the decision to withdraw its recognition of Cambodia's seat at the United Nations if it includes the Khmer Rouge. The prime aim has been to keep away the Khmer Rouge from coming into power. The US used to provide aid to the coalition. American aid intended for Prince

Sihanouk had gone to the Khmer Rouge too. However, this US switch over has engaged the Khmer Rouge in war-activity much more than before. Their strategy has been to drain Phnom Penh's resources and to break its morale. The aim has been that if they can engage the government forces at war, a large part of its budget expenditure would go for defense, long-term investment and economic development would see its door closed, war-weariness and frustration would cloud the people—the country will plunge into economic and political instability. The group has been hoping that all these would contribute in lessening Hun Sen's credibility.

A proposal has come up from Hun Sen to pose an informal cease fire to coincide with the first meeting of the SNC but an announcement has been made from Khmer Rouge radio that, "despite the Jakarta agreement attacks would be stepped up until the last Vietnamese left the country."²⁵ Resistance groups have been claiming that about 3000 Vietnamese troops remained in Cambodia even after the Vietnamese withdrawal. Also "western intelligence listening devices have picked up frequent battlefield commands in Vietnamese and aid workers of international relief agency who travel around Cambodia agree that Vietnam has been sending military advisors and crack fighting troops to assist the Phnom Penh army since September."²⁶ Phnom Penh defends this accusation by agreeing that they have remained as technicians or advisors.

However, even after the consensus about the Five's peace plan in Jakarta, war has not been stopped. Just the intensity of fighting has lessened. Though an

25. *FEER*, September 20, 1990, p. 11.

26. *Newsweek*, July 30, 1990, p.18-19.

appeal has been made to China to stop arming the Khmer Rouge, it has been lavish in its military aid to the Khmer Rouge.²⁷ also the non-communist factions have been getting the share.

d) UN operation expenditure

Implementation of the peace plan would involve huge financial expenditure. One estimate shows that US \$10b will be needed for the UN operation in Cambodia and it will involve some 10,000 peace keeping troops and an equal number of civilians.²⁸ So far the UN regulations are concerned, the US would be required to share about 25% of the total cost, while Japan's share would be about 11.4% though the expectation of the US from Japan is a little high.²⁹ Thus as adequate funding is required for an effective UN operation in Cambodia, timely and sufficient generation of the fund may also stand up as a problem.

CONCLUSION

Expectations raised by the UN peace proposal have not been matched by the pace of progress towards a peaceful solution of the long-drawn crisis in Cambodia. The peace plan as such appears to be well designed and despite apparent commitment of the parties the process through which it has moved so far has been complicated. A considerable period of time has passed in deciding the constitution of the SNC by the Cambodian factions. Though they have now formed the SNC, feuding continues over other related aspects, while rest of the provisions of the peace plan are yet to come into effect. In this situation the success of the

27. *FEER*, November 8, 1990, p. 11.

28. *FEER*, September 20, 1990, p.11.

29. *FEER*, September 13, 1990, p. 9.

plan depends primarily on the Cambodians themselves. Events have so far shown that instead of sincerely working for political accommodation the feuding parties have involved themselves in a dangerous race for power. In the context of what seems to be endless squabbling for power by the feuding factions, doubts are already raised about the continued patience of the external powers, particularly the "Big Five". The delay in reaching consensus might be taken by them as a sign of unwillingness to work. Eventually Cambodians might be forgotten. French Foreign Minister Ronald Dumas who presided over at the opening session at the latest Paris talks held on 21-22nd December showed that type of inclination. Though denied later, he clearly indicated the implications of too much dilly-dallying when he stated "the international community could not devote itself indefinitely to the fate of Cambodia as it had other priorities". This is rendered more significance by the eruption of the Gulf crisis which has drawn the attention of the whole international community at the expense of many other Third World problems including that in Cambodia.

It needs to be stressed also that long-term peace and total solution will not be reached in Cambodia unless and until the backers of Cambodian factions commit themselves totally to the peace process. The role and infest of China as already indicated may be very significant, particularly because of its leverages on the Khmer Rouge. In any event, the road to peace in Cambodia is far from smooth. The overriding need of the hour is the recognition of the need for reconciliation, understanding and cooperation between the feuding factions in Cambodia. Mutual concession and give and take, not confrontation and competition can help the process of peace more than anything else.