

Chapter Five

Cry for Freedom

(The 1980s)

A year after the victory of the Khmer Rouge over Lon Nol's regime, the Cambodian community in France gained a clearer picture of the situation in Cambodia. The Khmer Rouge had turned into a dictatorial regime, committing the cruellest acts, unprecedented in world history.

Cambodian refugees, fleeing Cambodia one after the other, provided clear substantiation of the Khmer Rouge regime's savagery. They described in detail the great hardship and food deprivation they had endured, as well as the slaughter of the innocent that the Khmer Rouge had committed most cruelly.

Cambodian watchers of the situation in Cambodia clearly comprehended that they could never hope that the Khmer Rouge leaders would be able to bestow freedom, rights, and human dignity on the Cambodian people. In particular, those compatriots

never hoped those leaders would open the country to relations with the world. Traditionally, Cambodian people, as Buddhist devotees, whenever they experience suffering, take refuge in Buddhism and nurture the tiny hope that their lives will be better and their future brighter one day.

In France, those compatriots went to pagodas to reestablish a system of social contacts at first, and later a network of political contacts. Due to the Khmer Rouge clique's weird rule of the country, the Cambodians at all social strata in France, like the majority of Cambodian citizens in Cambodia, lost everything, specifically the land they love, which turned them into a group of countryless people.

Refugees Are Neither Small nor Big Shots

High-ranking officials, including former government ministers, diplomats, and army generals, as well as ordinary employees and privates, all became refugees with the same rights. In France,

people generally felt that, since they were in the same situation, they had equal rights and that there was neither a small nor a big shot, nor those with high nor low status, as in the previous era.

To offer their views on Cambodia's future or put forward their opinions about national reconstruction, some veteran politicians used religious ceremonial forums to present them to the public. Among those veteran politicians was Son Sann,¹ former prime minister of Prince Sihanouk in the 1960s, who had tried unsuccessfully to act as a mediator in the search for peaceful solutions to the Cambodian crisis in the 1970s. At a Buddhist ceremony, Son Sann said that the Khmer Rouge regime was a regime that would hit the wall, and he called on the Cambodians in France to ready themselves to replace the Khmer Rouge, which would definitely collapse one day. Some Cambodians' brains were imbued with the words that the Khmer Rouge would hit the wall, while the others countered Son Sann, saying that not only would

¹ In general, many Cambodians called him Lokta, meaning "Grandfather," because of his age.

the Khmer Rouge hit the wall, but they would also break through that wall.

At that time, I did not seem too interested in Buddhist ceremonies. However, it was mostly Khim Khankeo and Ung You Tecklin who told me about what had happened and about social events organized by the Cambodian community in France. They also told me about Son Sann's views on preserving Cambodian identity and rebuilding Cambodia. I was strongly impressed by their nationalist views and their focus on rebuilding the country and our society. Anyway, I wanted to know what activities overseas Cambodians could do to help our Cambodia return to the right path. Therefore, I asked Khim Khankeo and Tecklin to take me to see Son Sann spontaneously. One day, we went to Son Sann's house at 45bis, Acacia Street, 17th Quarter, Paris, an orderly, elite area not too far from Charles de Gaulle Place. We knocked on the door and asked to meet Son Sann, but someone inside said, "He is not home." At that time, I seemed very keen to meet Son Sann. However, it was not that easy to meet him like that, for he was an important person, a VIP, a big shot.

Who Is Son Sann ?

Son Sann was born into an old family in Khmer Kampuchea Krom (Cambodia in Cochinchina, the southern part of Vietnam). According to his official biography, Son Sann was born on October 5, 1911, in Phnom Penh, not in Vietnam, as some people believe. He spoke Cambodian without a Khmer Krom accent, like a Vietnamese-speaking Cambodian, because he had lived with a Vietnamese nanny.² His father was Oknha [honorary title] Son Sach, who left Kampuchea Krom to live in Phnom Penh to further his studies under the auspices of Prince Sisowath Sihanouk. Afterwards, Oknha Son Sach worked directly with Prince Norodom Suramarit, when the latter was the minister of agriculture, before he was crowned king.

His Majesty King Norodom Suramarit was Prince Sihanouk's father. The Son's family was known to almost all Khmer Krom

² I was told this story by a close female aide to Grandfather Son Sann, when we were together in France before the end of the 1970s.

people, as it was the family of a hero named Chauvay Kuy, or Governor Kuy. Chauvay Kuy, the chief of Preah Trapeang District (now Tra Vinh Province in Vietnam), sacrificed his life to preserve Theravada Buddhism for Cambodian nationals in Kampuchea Kraom.

In his childhood, Son Sann was a young Cambodian graduate of a famous French school known as the Superior Trade School (H.E.C., or Hautes Études Commerciales) in 1933. After returning to Cambodia in 1934, Son Sann was appointed deputy governor of Battambang Province³. From 1937 to 1939, he was transferred to serve as deputy governor of Prey Veng Province, where I was born.

With the intention of applying the knowledge of trade he had learned, Son Sann resigned from public service and worked in his father-in-law's Le Petit Paris Company. In 1940, when Japan negotiated with France to purchase Cambodia's milled rice, the French authorities included him in the French delegation to Tokyo.

³ In that era, a deputy governor was called Phou Chhuoy Khet in Khmer (ភ្នំឈ្មួញខេត្ត).

In 1946, under the leadership of Prince Yutevong, a Democrat Party government was formed, and subsequently, Son Sann served as finance minister. Between 1946 and 1968, he held ministerial posts many times, including Economy and Finance Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, Foreign Minister, and Prime Minister.

During the National Assembly term of the Democratic Party from 1951 to 1952, Son Sann was elected Phnom Penh Constituency MP and appointed President of the National Assembly. He founded the National Bank of Cambodia in 1955 and served as bank governor until 1968. Son Sann was a close associate of Prince Sihanouk and served as the prince's economic and finance adviser during the Sangkum Reas Niyum era. Another trusted person of the prince was Samdech Penn Nouth, who accompanied Prince Sihanouk when the latter fled to live in China and later escorted the royal to live in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge regime. Son Sann was a Buddhist devotee. His children and grandchildren said that he had prayed to Lord Buddha

regularly since one of his sons died in a traffic accident in Cambodia and since he resigned from public service in 1968.

In France in the 1970s, many people said that Son Sann prayed to Lord Buddha twice a day and gave up consuming alcohol despite being used to drinking good wine. At that time, in France, Son Sann was still respected and befriended by some Cambodian nationals who were former public servants. In June 1976, Son Sann set up an association called the General Association of Overseas Cambodians, or AGKE (Association Générale des Khmers à l'étranger) for short.

General Association of Overseas Cambodians, or AGKE

The association statute underlined the following objectives: "To safeguard Buddhism, culture, and Cambodian civilisation; support and strengthen national solidarity and fraternity among all Cambodians, and provide each other with spiritual, moral, physical, and material relief."

Among the association founders, I noticed many dignitaries; some held posts as prime minister or were high-ranking officials in the Lon Nol and Sihanouk regimes. They included Tep Phan, Sim Va, Nong Kimny, Yem Sambaur, Chai Thoul, In Tam, Son Veunsai, Thonn Ouk, Sok Chhong, and Koun Wick, General Kong Thuch, General Srei Saman, Thiuonn In, Ker Nol, Net Kuon, Say Bory, Say Boran, Neang Phang, Troeung Mealy, Dr Sep Hieng, Mrs Then Tioeun, Mrs Suon Kaset, and so forth. This impressive membership showed that the association had regrouped several non-communist high-ranking officials, politicians, and intellectuals. At that time, the AGKE, the only reliable Cambodian association in France, was joined by all the Cambodian nationalists, including the royalists, democrats, and pro-republicans. Because Prince Sihanouk was not yet in sight, Son Sann was seen as a hard-sought overseas dignitary who could muster support from Cambodian refugees.

Khmer Rouge Amasses 17 April Victory Alone

Following their victory in April 1975, the Khmer Rouge was not in haste to invite Prince Sihanouk and Penn Nouth, respectively their Head of State and Prime Minister, to return to Cambodia immediately. They waited until one of their leaders, Khieu Samphan, visited China in August 1975, allowing the two important figures to return to Cambodia. According to an official statement issued on August 18, 1975, Khieu Samphan had met with Chinese leaders Deng Xiaoping and Hua Kuo-feng.

Members of the Khmer Rouge delegation⁴ at the time consisted mainly of Ieng Sary, Deputy Prime Minister; Sarin Chhak, Foreign Minister; Ieng Sary's wife, Ieng Thirith, Minister of Social Affairs; Keat Chhon and Thiuonn Prasith, alternate members of the Politburo of the Cambodian National United Front's Central Committee.

⁴This was reported by the international press, especially the Chinese News Agency, or Xinhua.

I believe Deng Xiaoping's recommendations may have finally led the Khmer Rouge to agree to set a month and a time for Prince Sihanouk and Penn Nouth to return to Cambodia. They set September 9, 1975, as the date to invite the two leaders to return, although their special congress, held in the wake of their Phnom Penh victory on April 25, 26, and 27, unanimously recognized "Prince Sihanouk as the Head of State and president of the Cambodian National United Front and a great patriotic dignitary having taken part in making their revolution a success in the struggle to liberate the whole Cambodia."

Prince Sihanouk Travels to New York

In September 1975, after staying for one week in Cambodia, Prince Sihanouk was assigned to travel to New York to deliver a speech at the United Nations in his capacity as Head of State. On his trip to New York, the Prince, accompanied by Khmer Rouge officials, passed through France. In France, French television

reporters interviewed him, for they wanted to know the concrete situation concerning the Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia. At that time, Prince Sihanouk, still defending the Khmer Rouge regime, described Phnom Penh as a place where livelihood was full of peace and organisation was good, safety was real, and so forth. He said his role as Head of State was better than that of Queen Elizabeth II of Great Britain, because he could carry out his mission abroad as Cambodia's roving ambassador.

At the time, because I had already waited so long for news from Cambodia, I prepared a 16 mm film camera to record the prince's interview on French television Antenne 2, as we still did not have a VCR.

However, in October 1975, French newspapers, Le Figaro and La Croix, published two articles: one on October 15, 1975, written by Jean Boudaria, and another on October 24, by Francois Ponchaud, who had lived in Cambodia for a long time and was an expert on the Khmer Rouge issue. The two articles recounted the destruction of Cambodia and the massacre and forced labour inflicted on the Cambodian people by the Khmer Rouge. The news

caused growing panic and turmoil throughout the whole world, specifically in overseas Cambodian communities. In October 1975, an estimated 400,000 refugees arrived in Thailand.

Sihanouk Asks for Resignation

From the Khmer Rouge regime's post of Head of State

Following his trip to the United Nations, Prince Sihanouk returned quietly to Phnom Penh. Since then, the world received no news from him until April 1976. At that time, the prince announced on the national radio station his resignation from the post of Head of State of the Khmer Rouge regime. In 1976, the Khmer Rouge adopted a new constitution, changing Cambodia to "Democratic Kampuchea," with Pol Pot as premier and Khieu Samphan chosen as President of the Praesidium, meaning head of state, to replace Prince Sihanouk.

The Khmer Rouge promised the prince a pension of USD 8,000 a year. However, in truth, the Khmer Rouge did not pay him

even a dollar as promised. According to news leaked from the West a few weeks before his resignation, Head of State Prince Sihanouk received the Swedish ambassador, who described the meeting to the international press.⁵

Since then, we, from the outside, have very seldom received news about him or his colleagues; at that time, the Khmer Rouge was carrying out the genocide policy fully and energetically. The world waited until January 1979 to see Prince Sihanouk reemerge and play an important role on the Cambodian political stage anew.

AGKE Activities

AGKE's activities ranged from social affairs and religion to political activities. Among its efforts, the association's first idea was to establish international relations, such as preparing a complaint dated September 27, 1976, and submitting it to the UN Secretary-

⁵ A Correspondent, *Waging War on the Land*, *Far Eastern Economic Review*, March 26, 1976, pp. 24-25.

General, requesting an investigation into human rights abuses in Cambodia. The UN Secretary-General did not offer a positive answer, arguing that the United Nations could do nothing if there were neither consent nor cooperation from the Khmer Rouge. AGKE then raised this human rights abuse issue with Amnesty International, with the firm belief that at least the voices of innocent Cambodian citizens were heard. Other activities included recreating the royal ballet, with Princess Norodom Vicheahra as the star. Another activity was building a pagoda for Buddhist monks in Paris.

Afterwards, the royal ballet not only demonstrated AGKE's efforts to protect Cambodian culture and tradition, but also became a way for the association to raise funds to support military activities carried out by a group of combatants named Khmer Sereika along the Cambodian-Thai border.

Khim Khankeo and Tecklin joined this association from scratch. The two friends regularly attended the association's weekly meetings and sometimes helped with office work. Khim Khankeo was talkative and knew how to get closer to Son Sann.

He convinced Son Sann to take notice of my work by praising my knowledge, quality, and high morals, which inspired the veteran politician to want me to work with him for national interests. Therefore, Khim Khankeo served as a spokesperson between Son Sann and me. He told me that he respected and loved Son Sann because the latter was brave, clean, and nationalist. At the same time, he informed Son Sann that he respected and loved me because I had achieved professional success and was endowed with strong patriotism. It was obvious that Khankeo had created conditions for Son Sann to intend to meet me and for me to want to see Son Sann. Finally, Son Sann asked Khankeo to convince me to join the AGKE. As Son Sann was ready to receive me at his residence at any time, Khankeo arranged for Son Sann and me to meet.

Meeting with Son Sann

I met Grandfather Son Sann at his house on Acacia Street on a Sunday afternoon in September 1976. Normally, when I was not working, I did not wear a suit and necktie as I did on working

days. Therefore, I went to Son Sann, a former prime minister of Cambodia and a high-ranking official who held the post of foreign minister when I was born, wearing clothes that were not appropriate: a T-shirt and jeans. Actually, I didn't really care and wasn't knowledgeable about protocol, but I was punctual. I rang the bell of the exquisitely decorated elite-style shop house. After the door was opened, I was ushered into the sitting room where Son Sann, wearing a three-piece suit and necktie, stood to greet me. With him were Mrs Suon Kaset, a woman in her 30s wearing eyeglasses to take notes, and one of his sons, Monir, an architect, serving drinks.

In response to the greetings, I raised my hands to pay my respects, as is our tradition. The grandfather warmly shook my hands. I was strongly impressed by the character of the man whom I had never met in person before. I felt he looked younger than his age. At that time, I was just 26 years old, while he was 65. Son Sann was tall, and his ears were long, which, according to our Cambodian belief, meant he would have a long life. Anyway, at the first ever meeting, Son Sann seemed weak. However, many

years later, when we worked together, I noticed that he had the stamina and patience to carry out his strenuous jobs. Actually, I did not expect to be honoured by such a warm welcome from the former prime minister.

Son Sann gave a long account of the political situation in Cambodia under every regime. He stressed that whenever Cambodians were divided, the country always weakened and might face the danger of vanishing from the face of the earth. That said, a few years earlier, before the collapse of the republican regime, Son Sann had tried tirelessly to convince Prince Sihanouk, Lon Nol, and supporters on both sides, such as the United States and China, to hold peaceful negotiations. However, he failed because he lacked strong backing. Therefore, nobody either listened to or followed him. Eventually, the Khmer Rouge ascended to power, creating a cruel state that massacred their compatriots and violated their human rights. In fact, at the first meeting, we talked more about political than social and cultural issues.

As for myself, I offered only a brief description of my political experiences within the Democratic Party, particularly my personal contact with Chau Sau. Son Sann was especially impressed by this point, for he knew Chau Sau very well, as the latter had worked under him. He had trusted Chau Sau and recognised that he was a high-calibre colleague. I informed Son Sann that I was not anti-monarchy, and that this was the contradiction between Chau Sau and me.

At the end of the meeting, I was resolved to support the former prime minister and join his association, AGKE. At that time, Son Sann told Mrs Suon Kaset to help me participate in publishing AGKE's monthly bulletin, called the Letter of Information. This letter was published for the Cambodian community and sent to the press in France.

Working Hard for the Cambodian Community

From that day on, I tried to perform my work as conscientiously as possible at the AGKE. I spent many hours each day, outside my working hours, serving this association. The AGKE, like the other Cambodian associations, had members and supporters. Still, only a small number of active members and volunteers came to help, because most people were busy earning their daily living.

At first, I was assigned to publish the bulletins alone. As the publication section leader, I had no partner or assistant. I had to collect information and write many articles myself. Not only that, but I also had to type, edit, and print articles, and mail those letters to all the members. Sometimes, I got help from friends in other sections, who were generally the same people: Son Sann's own children and grandchildren, since the association used his house as its head office.

At weekends, many members gathered to listen to reports on the association's activities or on political developments in Cambodia presented by Son Sann. After each meeting, I did not return home and continued the association's office work. Although I was responsible for the information letter section, I still had other work at this association. Aside from contributing, I also volunteered to carry out various activities in the association, such as doing trivial work at the office; driving other members, devoid of transportation means, home; paying visits to refugees, whose number in France was growing; travelling to provinces to set up the association's branches; performing religious rites, or travelling with Son Sann, having programs to meet Cambodian citizens all over France.

At that time, the AGKE was an important association, joined by a great many big and small shots, but it was challenged by other associations whose numbers had mushroomed. Some associations had resolved to offer support to anti-Khmer Rouge combatants on the Cambodian-Thai border.

According to a documented history of the KPNLF (Khmer People's National Liberation Front), in the wake of the republican regime's collapse on April 17, 1975, several Khmer Republic soldiers refused to lay down their arms but formed armed groups in November 1975. These groups included those led by Keth Reth, a Republican Regime colonel; Sek Sam Iet, an army general of the Republican Regime; and Khuon Thay. In 1976, other groups also emerged, such as those led by Ear Nguon, Prum Vit, Yuok Man, Kan Vanna, Ly Thieng Chek, Kirirom, and Keo Chuon, respectively. Most of the groups were autonomous, trading in logs and mining precious gemstones to feed their movements by working closely with Thai army generals.

In Paris, a Cambodian association called Moul Khmer, created by two former republican military generals and a bank finance expert, also had contact with those combatants. In February 1977, the Moul Khmer Association tried to unite the Keth Reth and Ear Nguon groups. However, in early May 1977, the groups of Sek Sam Iet and Khuon Thai united, and later, in October 1977, the Keth Reth group was dissolved. In November of

the same year, a movement united the groups of Im Chhoodeth and Sek Sam Iet.

Khmer Sereika Resistance Movement

Im Chhoodeth was a former army colonel of the Khmer Republic regime. Before the country fell, he served as a military attaché at the Cambodian Embassy in Bangkok. In this position, he worked closely with the Thai Army High Command. He was close to the Thai Army's Commander General Kriangsak Chomanan, who became Thai prime minister after the military coup in October 1977. Im Chhoodeth knew the Thai leader intimately, to the point that he could go in and out to meet Kriangsak at any time. Im Chhoodeth spoke Thai fluently, as he studied up to high school in Thailand. In addition, Im Chhoodeth was known to most Cambodians as a famous novelist. He wrote many novels, but the most well-known one was titled "Two Wives."

Following the fall of the Republican Regime, Im Chhoodeth did not leave the country. He continued to organise networks of combatants to carry out the struggle for freedom. After they made a clear decision to support a united movement of Cambodian combatants, Thai army generals launched a search for a Cambodian politician to lead the resistance movement opposing the Khmer Rouge. At that time, Im Chhoodeth suggested to Kriangsak that Son Sann should be invited to unite those combatants because, as he understood it, Son Sann was a highly capable and clean Cambodian dignitary. This is what Im Chhoodeth told me and other resistance fighters later. Nonetheless, according to Son Sann, the person who came into contact with him as a mediator between him and the Thai military authorities was Le Quoc Tuy,⁶ a leader of the anti-Hanoi Free Vietnam group.

Finally, I later learned that a Thai colonel named Chavalit Yongchaiyudh had travelled to Paris, contacted Son Sann, and

⁶ The Memoirs of Son Sann, Cambodia Daily Press, 2011, p.127

asked him to form a resistance movement on the Cambodian-Thai border. The colonel, who later became Thailand's prime minister, was an expert in Cambodian affairs. Chavalit was an influential Thai army officer who could reap enormous benefits for Thailand by meddling in the dispute in Cambodia.

At first, I was unaware that Chavalit had come into contact with the AGKE and that the association had secretly provided financial support to the border combatants, for it was what we call high politics; everything is secret, known only to a tiny group of people close to Son Sann. In fact, Son Sann carried out these high-politics activities only with a handful of confidants, almost all of whom were a few active members of the association, and some of his children. Among them, aside from Mrs Suon Kaset, Son Sann's son-in-law, Chhay Hancheng, held the post of health state secretary in the 1960s. Chhay Hancheng served Son Sann as his bodyguard, secretary, or office chief. At Son Sann's order, Chhay Hancheng did everything without exception.

One day, when Son Sann was unwell and unable to speak up at a meeting, he murmured into the ear of his son-in-law, who then conveyed his words loudly, as if speaking into a microphone.

Later, I saw another person, Neang Chin Han, a former high-ranking Cambodian public servant who was also close to Son Sann and a military general in the republican era, Dien Del, who was known to be a sufficiently capable officer in the Lon Nol army. After several meetings, I noted that the general had a strong political stance because he said the army had to serve democracy.

Neang Chin Han was a high-ranking public servant who graduated from the Royal Administration School and served as chief of Prince Sihanouk's secretariat in the 1960s. In France, he studied political science and business and graduated from both. Neang Chin Han had expertise in administration and could write political speeches in French well. He had close relations with Mrs Suon Kaset, who worked in Prince Sihanouk's office in the 1960s and was responsible for publishing the monthly bulletin "Kambuja." Mrs Suon Kaset, who received a French-style

education, was born into the family of a Cambodian big shot who had been a cabinet minister, an ambassador, and so forth. She spoke French fluently. She also spoke Cambodian quite well, but she could neither read nor write the language. Mrs Suon Kaset was married to a high-ranking Agriculture Ministry and had three children. She took them to live in France after the Khmer Rouge captured Phnom Penh, leaving behind her husband. Since the Khmer Rouge took control of the country, she had never had any news from her husband at all.

Because Cambodian associations in France sprouted like mushrooms, some people took the initiative to coordinate their activities by, for instance, setting up a liaison committee called CDL (Comité de Liaison) or a neutral commission, and so forth.

However, until 1979, about 150 Cambodian associations were set up in France, half of which were in Paris and its outskirts. Those Cambodians forming the associations might perceive that their political activities could create obstacles to, or affect, the actions of the Khmer Rouge inside the country by holding

discussions, disseminating publications, issuing statements, publishing bulletins, or giving news conferences, and so forth.

As for me, I already and unequivocally believed that to liberate Cambodia from the Khmer Rouge, there should be only concrete actions on the battlefield, meaning on Cambodian territory directly, not from afar, thousands of kilometres away from the country. Because of my clear-cut resolve, I decided to prepare myself to do something closer to Cambodia, or at least to work personally with the freedom-loving combatants on the battlefield. My first decision was to resign from the two Motton Companies.

Out of Sight, Out of Mind

That day was a day full of anguish and depression for the family of my boss. When I presented my letter of resignation in October 1978, Mrs Motton was crying heartbreakingly. I told them that my future was in Cambodia, not in France. I could not afford to live safely alone while I was aware that my people and my

country were encountering tragedy, unprecedented in the history of humankind. In reality, at that time, I still did not have clear ideas about when or how to return to Cambodia and the border areas. After leaving Motton Company, I worked for another two companies: 1) La Triperie de la Villette and 2) Allen-Bradley, an American company, before leaving France forever. Anyway, I resigned from Motton Company reluctantly to sever my sentimental bond with that family. Otherwise, I might entangle myself in personal problems, preventing me from focusing my mind on what I perceived I must do in the future. Now, to me, everything should commence with a sentence: "Out of Sight, Out of Mind."

Khmer Rouge in Conflict with Neighbouring Countries

As in Cambodia, the cruel Khmer Rouge regime began to wreak devastation relentlessly. Through international newspapers, I learned from news reports that, up to 1977, some 1.2 million Cambodian citizens had lost their lives due to starvation, forced labour, or slaughter. Thousands of Cambodian refugees had fled

to seek shelter on Thai and Vietnamese territory. Along with that, however, the Khmer Rouge, however, encountered armed opposition within the country and armed confrontations with neighbouring countries, namely Thailand and Vietnam.

The root cause of the dispute with Thailand could be said to stem from the two countries' ideologies, as they had different dogmas, in addition to a territorial dispute. Besides, at that time, Cambodia adhered to a hard-line communist regime, while Thailand was a liberal country and a close ally of the United States and used to fight the Communists in Vietnam as well. Moreover, since October 1976, thanks to a military coup, Thailand had been led by a right-wing government that was absolutely opposed to communism. As such, this new Thai government adopted a policy against communist Cambodia, called Democratic Kampuchea, as they believed that it might provide sanctuaries for Thai communists to attack and oppose their regime. Besides, the Thai government at that time also had tactics to back anti-Khmer Rouge Cambodian movements, especially the Khmer Serei (Free Khmer) group and Cambodian Sereika.

At the beginning, in the dispute between the Khmer Rouge and Thailand, Vietnam, which used to be a comrade-in-arms of the Khmer Rouge, lent support to the group unreservedly. In 1976, when the Khmer Rouge announced that US planes had bombarded Siem Reap Province, Hanoi and Beijing both echoed the accusation made by the Khmer Rouge.⁷ However, Hanoi seemed to react more strongly to the bombardment than Beijing.

In March 1976, the international press reported that Vietnam severely condemned the bombing in one of its statements, which mainly stated, "The United States has continued to use Thai territory to oppose Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam. They support the Khmer reactionaries on Thai territory and secretly infiltrate them into Cambodia to carry out sabotage and destructive activities against the Cambodian revolution."

In that era, the two Communist countries, Vietnam and Democratic Kampuchea, stood shoulder to shoulder against their common enemy, even though they had begun to have a border

⁷ Nayan Chanda, the Barbarous Raid Mystery, Far Eastern Economic Review, March 12, 1976, p. 14.

dispute gradually since May 1975. In August 1975, when Communist Vietnamese Leader Le Duan visited Phnom Penh, the two sides, Vietnam and the Khmer Rouge, agreed to settle the dispute peacefully. The international press reported that thousands of Cambodian refugees fleeing to seek shelter in various provinces in Vietnam were sent back to Democratic Kampuchea. Some others were arrested and handed over to the Khmer Rouge. Nonetheless, some refugees who had crossed into border provinces and gone deeper into Vietnam continued to live there. In Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon), about 10,000 refugees lived, most of them in pagodas. The press pointed out that, of the refugees, only a few hundred were able to get permission to leave for France before Vietnam severed ties and relationships with Phnom Penh.

China's Strategy Leads Thailand and Khmer Rouge To Put Off Their Dispute

In August 1976, Thailand and the Khmer Rouge regime tried to improve their relations by agreeing to open border passes for trade, although the border dispute continued to take place. Nevertheless, in 1977, Thai-Khmer Rouge relations were damaged again due to military clashes provoked by the firing of artillery and air attacks launched by the Thai military. On January 28, 1977, 60 Thai villagers were killed by the Khmer Rouge. Since then, Thailand closed its border passes with Cambodia. In November, the Thai government sent an official letter of protest to the Khmer Rouge authority. The Khmer Rouge then issued an eight-page statement asserting that Thailand was the one responsible for this killing and that those events had taken place on Cambodian territory. Since then, the Khmer Rouge remained tight-lipped.

At first, Thai officials asserted that Khmer Rouge soldiers had crossed the border to slaughter Thai citizens and destroy their

property. Later, military situation analysts in Bangkok interpreted that the area of Aranhya Prathet where the massacre took place was the hideout of anti-Communist Cambodians called Khmer Serei,⁸ who had been carrying out a struggle to liberate Cambodia from the Khmer Rouge. They wanted to interpret that, if there were clashes, they would have occurred because Khmer Serei opposed the Khmer Rouge and not because of the Thai government's forces.

It was estimated that there were some 2,000 Khmer Serei on the border, having contact with some Thai military officers and some Cambodian-Thai traders. The Khmer Serei fighters were operating in the area of Aranhya Prathet. This group used Thai territory to conduct guerrilla warfare against the Khmer Rouge to seek and attract additional aid, as well as to cause trouble for the Khmer Rouge army. The guerrilla warfare carried out by those Khmer Serei fighters made the Khmer Rouge furious, and then it launched counterattacks into Thai territory. Between March and

⁸ Norman Peagam, Political Stability at Stake, Questions after the Massacre, Far Eastern Economic Review, February 11, 1977, pp 9-10.

October 1977, armed clashes intensified and spread to the Thai province of Trat.

To respond to the Khmer Rouge attacks, Thailand dispatched armed canoes and warplanes to the area. Thai Supreme Commander General Kriangsak declared that the Thai Army firmly adhered to the policy of retaliation against any violation of Thai territory to defend sovereignty as well as the rights of the Thai people.

The onslaught occurred right at the time when Pol Pot concluded a five-day fraternal visit to North Korea and began an official visit to China, starting on September 28, 1977. Coincidentally, former Thai Prime Minister Kukrit Pramoj also paid a private visit to Beijing, where he held an intimate discussion with President Hua Kua-feng. Maybe at that time China started intervening to end the Khmer Rouge-Thai dispute, with the implication of establishing a new alliance against the Soviet Union and Vietnam. On October 20, 1977, the Thai military clique that toppled the government of Seni Pramoj on October 6, 1976, returned to power by overthrowing the anti-communist right-wing

government of Thanin Kraivichien and installing General Kriangsak as prime minister. In his public statements, General Kriangsak repeatedly said he wanted to improve relations with the communist Indochina countries. Improving relations was the new prime minister's key task.

In November 1977, a day before General Kriangsak officially assumed power, the Khmer Rouge radio published a statement calling on Thailand to hold talks to ameliorate relations between the two countries. The statement insistently asked Thailand to meet with Khmer Rouge officials in Vientiane (Laos). The Khmer Rouge said that it had invited Thailand for the first time after Ieng Sary, the Khmer Rouge deputy prime minister and foreign minister, had met with the Thai Foreign Minister Uppadit Pachariyangkun at the United Nations on October 12, 1977. The Thais welcomed the appeal. Many political analysts understood that the sudden change in the Khmer Rouge strategy resulted from a Chinese policy that, since 1975, had tried to advance good relations between Thailand and the Khmer Rouge.

At the end of January 1978, the military-backed government sent a high-level Thai diplomatic delegation, led by Foreign Minister Uppadit Pachariyangkun, to Phnom Penh to improve Khmer Rouge-Thai relations and settle border disputes peacefully. In a speech at a reception welcoming the Thai delegation, Ieng Sary revealed the reason for the change in Khmer Rouge policy. He said that any governments in this region, whether communist or non-communist, had an interest in supporting the Khmer Rouge in the war against Vietnam's aggressive troops, whom they called ever-ambitious expansionists. At that time, the troops of the Khmer Rouge and Vietnam were fighting each other so fiercely along the border. Ieng Sary said, "If our Democratic Kampuchea were not safe and peaceful due to aggression or interference in its internal affairs, then other countries in Southeast Asia would not have peace and safety either."

As regards bilateral relations, in his speech, Ieng Sary said, "We should not do anything to violate each other's safety, such as all kinds of intelligence activities and sabotage." We should not permit anybody to use our territory directly or indirectly in any

case... against the Thai-Cambodian joint declaration issued in October 1975.” Saying so, Ieng Sary wanted to refer to the secret activities carried out by the non-communist Khmer groups, or Khmer Serei, initiated and supported by some Thai army generals. Those anti-Khmer Rouge fighters were selected from among the Cambodian refugees living in Thai refugee camps along the border. In his reply to Ieng Sary’s speech, the Thai foreign minister said, “It is extremely regrettable that we misunderstood each other in the past, and that there were some actions taking place through the hands of a third party.”

Who Was the Third Hand ?

In Bangkok, Prime Minister General Kriangsak told reporters about the role of the “third party hands,” and he seemed to recognize that the Khmer Rouge was not responsible for the border clashes. Nevertheless, the Thai Government did not reveal who was behind the “third-party hands.” The weird story about the

third-party hands was disclosed by the Thai press two months later, after the Thai authorities seized some weapons in Aranya Prathet district.

In the afternoon of December 20, 1977,⁹ along a road in Aranya Prathet district, boy scouts, deployed to work with the police, found weapons consisting of AK-47 and M16 rifles, hand grenades, and some supplies on a bus with 30 Cambodians and four Buddhist monks. The police seized the bus, mistaking it for an arms-trafficking vehicle, and detained all the passengers. In the end, those Cambodians identified themselves as members of an anti-communist resistance movement, supported by the Thai Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC). At that time, a police officer contacted the ISOC. The next morning, early in the morning, an ISOC colonel came and arranged for the release of the 30 Cambodian fighters.

Those Cambodians, members of a Cambodian resistance movement, received strong support from a Thai Buddhist monk

⁹ Richard Nations, Busload of Trouble, Far Eastern Economic Review, March 10, 1978, p. 10.

named Preah Kru Kitti Vuttho, chief abbot of Chittabhawan Pagoda near the seaside in the Thai town of Pattaya. This Buddhist monk was well known for presenting himself as an anti-communist, right-wing political figure. In his preaching, he used to tell male and female Buddhist devotees that “killing the Communists is not a sin.” He used to express the view that he did not fear giving up his robe to take up arms fighting against the communists to defend the nation, religion, and throne. He played a key role in the strategy against Thailand’s communists. That was why Preah Kru Kitti Vuttho carried out activities to support the Khmer Serei Resistance Movement, or Khmer Sereika, unreservedly.

Im Chhoodeth, a leader of the Khmer Sereika Movement, revered Preah Kru Kitti Vuttho as his own mentor. A large number of Im Chhoodeth’s subordinates, known as members of the Reachchaksei Movement, used to stay in the Chittabhawan Pagoda, where they always received food and money from the chief abbot, Preah Kru Kitti Vuttho.

Normally, the chief abbot had his own network of Thai intelligence agents planted along the Cambodian-Thai border. This

network was tasked with selecting refugees crossing into Thailand, in or out of the camps, and wanting to join anti-communist resistance movements. After conducting screening through repeated interviews and knowing unambiguously that those Cambodian refugees definitely had the intention to join anti-communist movements, the network then took them to stay temporarily in the Chittabhawan Pagoda, pending a meeting with those responsible for Khmer Serei or Khmer Sereika. Usually, newcomers still could not meet the chief abbot straightaway after arriving in the pagoda, but the abbot had already arranged a plentiful supply of food for them. Important people could stroll along the seaside and receive some cash for expenses during the waiting period.

Only after several days did those Cambodian representatives come to the Chittabhawan Pagoda, and once they accepted the new arrivals as their members, they took them to pay respect to the chief abbot, arrange a ceremony for them to swear not to betray each other, and request the abbot's best wishes.

What was impressive was that Preah Kru Kitti Vuttho organised a ceremony for the newcomers to drink holy water and swear they would take part in the struggle to liberate the nation and build Cambodia as a republic with complete freedom and genuine democracy. At that time, nobody thought that our country would return to a monarchy, specifically a constitutional monarchy. Besides, everyone knew that during the Sangkum Reastr Niyum era of Prince Sihanouk in the 1950s and 1960s, Thailand sheltered the Khmer Serei group led by Son Ngoc Thanh, whom Prince Sihanouk accused of belonging to the republican clique against the Cambodian throne. Therefore, support for Cambodian republicans may have been a pattern among Thai politicians opposed to the Cambodian monarchy.

In his anti-communist activities, Preah Kru Kitti Vuttho definitely cooperated closely with the Thai Army. Absolutely, he was a key member of the so-called “third party hands” or “third forces” that used the armed forces of the Khmer Serei or Khmer Sereika to launch armed clashes frequently with the Khmer Rouge, prompting the latter to take retaliatory actions against Thai

locals in various villages along the Cambodian-Thai border. As such, General Kriangsak absolutely knew who the “third party hands,” or “third forces”, were.

Since mid-June 1976 in France, I saw articles in some French newspapers reporting the armed struggle against the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia; for instance, an article on a group of clandestine fighters conducting patrols and keeping watch in Cambodia’s jungles. The group leaders were all former military officers of the Khmer Republic, carrying out the struggle to liberate Cambodia and restore freedom and democracy.

If we had conducted a deeply rooted study of Thailand’s anti-communist strategy, the “third party hands” or “third forces” would have been the forces created by the ISOC to resist the advance of the three Indochina countries: Laos, Vietnam, and Democratic Kampuchea. The ISOC definitely implemented the Thai National Security Council’s policy, authorising the feeding of the forces previously known as Khmer Serei and Sereika, later, as well as the Free Vietnam and Free Laos forces.

Overall, the activities of the Thai Army's special unit and Preah Kru Kitti Vuttho were to feed all the forces called "Sereika." Some members of the resistance movement, the Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF), told me about the Thai authorities' involvement in their struggle.

Thai Soldiers Help Sereika Fighters

A member named Leng recounted the background of his life to me as follows:

In April 1975, at the time when the Khmer Rouge broke into the town of Battambang Province, all the residents were evacuated to live in the countryside. At that time, Leng, a Year 12 high school student, was assigned by the Khmer Rouge to work with a mobile land survey team that was relocated incessantly from one district to another. In July 1977, Leng was ordered to survey land at the Kamping Puoy dam in Western Cambodia. There, four or five Sereika fighters, dressed in black like the Khmer Rouge, were

often seen at night conducting propaganda and fomenting opposition against the Khmer Rouge. The whereabouts of their secret base were completely unknown. As he could no longer endure the torture inflicted on him by the Khmer Rouge and, due to food shortages and his craving for freedom, Leng and one of his coworkers, Chea, decided to escape from Khmer Rouge control in search of the secret base of the resistance fighters along the Cambodian-Thai border.

To prepare for their trip, they started stealing milled rice and hiding it in the jungle. After saving half a kilogram of rice, they quietly cooked it for the day they would flee the village. After walking barefoot across stretching rice fields and deep, thick jungles for a week, the two brave young men reached the border, as they knew that the area was Bantoat Hill. They were completely in the dark about where the Sereika group's base was. Anyway, they were resolved that they must join those resistance fighters to oppose the Khmer Rouge of Pol Pot. For several days, they saw neither a house nor a village. They were completely exhausted when they reached a remote village.

At that time, they did not realise that they had entered Thai territory, and that morning, when they spotted the first house, they jumped into it. Inside the house, a man was having his breakfast. He was a Thai border police officer. After seeing the two Cambodian young men enter abruptly, the Thai police officer was horrified because they had already reached the rifle cupboard. He suspected that the Khmer Rouge might trespass across the border, because clashes with them had often taken place in this area. Anyway, the two Cambodian young men did not have any malicious intention toward the Thai police officer and were unaware that they were standing near the weapon cupboard. Besides, they did not realise they were stepping onto Thai territory. Anyway, after trying to make the trip for several days, they were exhausted and unable to speak or gesture easily.

The Thai police officer then called in his Cambodian assistant to help with the translation, as the two people could not speak Thai at all. Finally, the Thai police officer believed that the two Cambodian young men had no bad intentions and had not done anything unfriendly to harm him. After offering meals to the two,

he sent them to the police station for questioning, because he still suspected that the two young men might be disguised Khmer Rouge soldiers coming to gather intelligence.

At the Thai police station, Leng and Chea were handcuffed and blindfolded. Another Thai police officer, the interrogator, sometimes pointed his pistol at them, according to interrogation techniques, to make sure that they were definitely the runaways from the Khmer Rouge regime and, unequivocally, not Khmer Rouge soldiers.

The questions were mainly: Are you Khmer Rouge soldiers? Where is the location of your unit? What are your names? Anyway, the answers from the two were still the same; nothing had changed: We are not Khmer Rouge soldiers, and we do not know any Khmer Rouge commanders at all. We are looking for Cambodian anti-Khmer Rouge groups because we want to join the Sereika fighters.

Following the long interrogation, the two young Cambodian men were sent by car to the police station in Pong Nam Ron district, where they arrived at noon. There, they were neither

handcuffed nor blindfolded as before, but were provided with a meal again. Despite not knowing about their future and having been hungry for several days, they tried to eat as much as they could. Under the Khmer Rouge, they had to work extremely hard, but they had only rice congee. The Thai police kept asking them the same questions, and their answers remained unchanged.

When the police no longer had any suspicions about the two young Cambodian men and were certain that they wanted to join the anti-Khmer Rouge resistance movement, those police officers then informed a Thai military officer and asked him to carry on the investigation. At that time, the two men were whisked off to the compound of a Thai Special Forces command whose exact whereabouts were unknown, because it appeared to be the housing of ordinary locals. The special military unit had a team of two officers, headed by a leader. Those officers wore no military uniform and showed no signs of being military men.

There, Leng and Chea were locked up by Thai soldiers in a large vehicle container for about a week. At that time, the two noticed two other Cambodians helping with cooking, boiling tea

water, and cleaning. In the compound of the special military team's office, Leng and his friend were no longer handcuffed. Later, they were allowed to stay in a nearby room, and then, like the other two Cambodians, they helped with cooking and cleaning. Later, the military men interviewed the two men again, asking questions similar to the police, but some others were clearer, such as: What do you both know how to do? What languages do you know how to speak? A month later, after living under strict control, the Thai military men asked Leng and Chea whether they really wanted to join the Sereika group, go to refugee camps, or return to Cambodia.

Once the Thai military men were sure Leng and Chea wanted to join the Sereika group, they took them to another military area in Trat province. Afterwards, they were sent by car from Trat to Borai, where gemstones are dug, in Chanthaburi province. In Borai, the Thais took them to a remote area. There, they saw a large warehouse where hundreds of sacks of supplies were stored. About 10 Cambodian-speaking workers in the depot were busy carrying sacks of milled rice, dried fish, cooking oil, and

many other items. A few minutes later, they took all the supplies into the jungle. Half an hour later, another group arrived. Among them, Leng noticed that one of his old friends, Pheap, was likely the supply chief of the two groups. Only when they spoke to Pheap in Cambodian could Leng realise he had finally met the Cambodian resistance fighters.

However, Leng and Chea could not meet those Cambodians straight away, because they needed to wait for another Thai military team in civilian clothes, riding Japanese-made motorbikes, from the jungle. The Thais told the two young men to walk with the Cambodian resistance fighters to their base, a few kilometres away. When they arrived at the foot of Bantoat Hill, Leng saw a five-by-five-metre plastic-covered hut equipped with a scant number of medical tools, which was the resistance fighters' hospital. A Cambodian medical officer managed this hospital. They were busy giving treatment to five or six Cambodian patients infected with malaria. After travelling another two hours, crossing streams and walking up and down many high grounds, all reached the hilltop at last.

Arriving at the entrance of the military command on the hill, Leng noticed Cambodian soldiers holding rifles standing under big trees in the dense jungle, impenetrable by sunlight. In the camp, Leng saw four bamboo huts. One hut was occupied by the Cambodian commander, and another by the Thai military stationed there to collect information and coordinate support and supplies for the rebel fighters. Finally, Leng was led to meet the Cambodian commander, Colonel Prum Vit, who welcomed him cordially and warmly. His subordinates called him “grandfather.” The colonel, whose character was impressive, had dark skin but was solid and strong, wearing shorts and a krama (Cambodian scarf).

His subordinates respected the grandfather because he was a commander with clear principles and a disciplined resistance fighter. At that time, members of the movement recognised that the commander sacrificed his life to serve the common interests and liberate Cambodia from the Khmer Rouge dictatorship. This demonstrated that, at that time, there were definitely troops of the Khmer Serei, or Sereika, supported by the Thai military.

In fact, in that era, the anti-Khmer Rouge resistance movements, no matter how much they resented and hated the Khmer Rouge, were unable to carry out sizeable activities that could jolt this genocide clique or cause anxiety to it. On the one hand, the tight control of the Khmer Rouge state authority over the citizens,¹⁰ living in a strict cooperative style, undertaking hard labour, and eating together, was a considerable obstacle to any attempts to free oneself or to revolt by any opposition movements or groups having shelters along the border, specifically along the Cambodian-Thai border. Moreover, the aid that Thailand provided to the anti-Khmer Rouge resistance movements was minimal. Thailand should be highly careful about its anti-Khmer Rouge activities, because behind the Khmer Rouge was the giant China, wielding enormous influence on Thailand's own security.

In that era, Thailand, in a regional context, required good cooperation from China rather than conducting activities against such a big country in Asia. Therefore, at that time, Thailand could

¹⁰ Prime Minister Hun Sen very accurately assessed the obstacles to the wriggling out in the book entitled "13 Decades of Cambodia's Journey", published by Pracheachon newspaper in 1996, pp. 234-237.

not act as a strong backing for the overthrow of the genocidal Democratic Kampuchea regime. Thailand stealthily fed the Khmer Serei or Khmer Sereika forces as tools only to bargain for its own security with the Khmer Rouge and China. The only resistance forces able to topple Pol Pot's regime were the forces of the Cambodian resistance fighters in the interior, supported by the country's daring step forward to unleash an onslaught on this regime. The subsequent events proved this tendency.

Dispute between the Khmer Rouge and Vietnam

If the dispute between the Khmer Rouge and Thailand stemmed from communist ideology against capitalism, then the dispute between the Khmer Rouge and Vietnam, who were comrades-in-arms, stemmed from several other reasons. On the one hand, the big communist China and the Soviet Union,¹¹

¹¹ The Soviet Union, whose capital city was Moscow, was a gathering of 15 communist countries under the authority of the Communist Party. After the end of the Cold War, the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, and

wielding influence on the Khmer Rouge and Vietnam respectively, also had conflict with each other. The dispute between the two giant communist states was affecting their subservient countries.

The differences between China and the Soviet Union had existed for years, since the 1960s. At first, the differences were ideological, starting in the 1950s when the Soviet Union moved away from Stalinism after Marshall Stalin passed away. China accused the Soviet Union of being revisionist and blamed it for what was called hegemony in the world. China opposed the Soviet Union's policy in Eastern Europe, specifically toward the events in Czechoslovakia in 1968. It regarded the Soviet Union as a social imperialist and said that the Soviet Union's foreign policy proved expansionist or hegemonic.

The outbreak of the border conflict between the two big countries in 1969 led China to realise more clearly that the Soviet

the 15 republics declared themselves independent states. They are: Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, Belorussia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Estonia, and Lithuania. During the Cold War, the Soviet Union was the leader of the Communist bloc against the Capitalist bloc led by the United States.

Union strongly threatened its security. China believed it had a strong interest in acting, in cooperation with the United States and the West, to counter the Soviet Union's hegemony. Moreover, Chinese leaders saw that cooperation would lead China toward modernisation, a key step in developing the country and making it prosperous.

Deng Xiaoping,¹² who escaped the purges during the Cultural Revolution, was the architect of this modernisation. This Chinese leader crafted the saying, “It doesn't matter what colour a cat has, provided that it catches mice.” The four modernisations of China were the modernisation of agriculture, industry, science and technology, and national defence. The four modernisations conformed to China’s theory called “Three Worlds Theory,” with which China regarded the United States and the Soviet Union as the First World; the developed countries of the West, including France, Great Britain, Germany, Australia, and Canada, as the Second World; and the developing countries as the Third World.

¹² Teng Xiao Ping or Deng Xiaoping

Using the tactic of surrounding the countryside to move toward attacking and capturing cities, Chinese leaders cajoled and induced the Second and Third Worlds to join forces to contain the influence of the First World. Nonetheless, in that era, China analysed that in the First World there were differences between the Soviet Union and the United States. At that time, China noticed that the Soviet Union was an offensive power while the United States was only a defensive power. Therefore, cooperating with the United States would pose no danger to China, especially since the United States pulled troops out of Vietnam. So, China had a strong interest in contacting and enticing the United States and Western countries to be close to it to resist the expansionism of the Soviet Union.”

Since the three communist Indochina countries (Laos, Vietnam, and Cambodia) scored victories in 1975, China, which used to say that relations between Vietnam and China were close like teeth and lips, saw that Vietnam was siding with the Soviet

Union, not with it.¹³ Political analysts in the West asserted that Vietnam received a huge quantity of aid and close cooperation from China for years. However, Vietnam still could not forget the bitter memory of China's control over the country over the past 1,000 years. The analysts added that when Vietnamese leader Le Duan visited China in September 1975, Deng Xiaoping repeatedly appealed to Vietnam to distance itself from Soviet control. The analysts also said that when he paid another visit to China in September 1977, Le Duan noticed that China's modernisation policy was biased toward, or favourable to, the West. At that time, Le Duan let China know that Hanoi was not yet prepared to distance itself from Soviet control. Political analysts underlined that Vietnamese leaders did not beam with satisfaction, because since 1975, while it had never provided Vietnam with any military aid, China had given a huge quantity of it to the Khmer Rouge. In addition, when the Khmer Rouge was in a border dispute with Vietnam in December 1977, China backed the Khmer Rouge,

¹³ All the points I have written were political analyses published by Western press I read.

repeating after the latter that Vietnam was the aggressor against Cambodia. China supported the Khmer Rouge and commended it for its efforts in the defence of territorial integrity.

On December 30, 1977, the Khmer Rouge announced that it was temporarily severing diplomatic ties with Vietnam while fierce fighting was taking place along the border. The Khmer Rouge accused Vietnam of attempting to set up a new communist party among the traitors. In an interview by a Yugoslav journalist in Phnom Penh, Khmer Rouge Prime Minister Pol Pot disclosed that Vietnam had the intention of incorporating Cambodia into the Indochinese Federation, where millions of Vietnamese could come and live on Cambodian territory¹⁴. Pol Pot perceived that within 30 years, Cambodian people might be turned into ethnic minorities. As usual, Vietnam rejected the accusation, explaining that the Khmer Rouge had created its internal problems itself.

¹⁴ Nayan Chanda, Vietnam Prepares for a Long War, *Far Eastern Economic Review*, April 21, 1978, pp. 17--22.

An expert on communist Indochina explained that the Cambodian Communist Party had two lines¹⁵. The first line was those close to Vietnam and supporting the Anti-Imperialist United Front. This line adopted the position on revolutionary solidarity among Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam. As for the second line, it regarded Prince Sihanouk as a feudal lord, a target that must be destroyed and toppled. This group embraced a communist policy called independence, not submission to the outside party, specifically Vietnam. Vietnam backed the first line all along. The expert asserted that Vietnamese leaders constantly recalled that, when the Khmer Rouge was still weak and asked Vietnam to make war in its place, Vietnam acquiesced. After Vietnam destroyed the military operation of Lon Nol called Chenla 2, it agreed to withdraw at the Khmer Rouge's request. However, because Pol Pot never recognised that it had helped him at the beginning of the war against Lon Nol, Vietnam was furious with him, since Vietnamese leaders discerned that Cambodians were

¹⁵ Asiaweek, Where Does It Leave Sihanouk, April 21, 1978, p.15.

ungrateful. The expert saw that Vietnamese leaders wanted special relations between Vietnam and Cambodia, like those between Vietnam and Laos, since they had helped the Khmer Rouge achieve a permanent victory over the troops of Lon Nol's Republic.

The expert analysed that, considering previous experiences, the Cambodians constantly feared that Vietnam's 70 million people might flood into Cambodia. Most Cambodian nationalist leaders recalled that present-day South Vietnam had been Cambodian territory. The territory was lost to Vietnam due to Vietnamese emigrants crossing into Cambodia. The Indochinese Communist Party, consisting of Vietnamese, Khmer, and Lao communists, stated its intention to create a federation of the three countries after liberating them from France's control. Nevertheless, since the Indochinese Communist Party's dissolution in 1951, the idea of establishing the federation has been abandoned. Analysts asserted that, based on comrade-in-arms and combative solidarity, Vietnamese leaders insisted on maintaining a special relationship with Laos and Cambodia. The analysts said that,

however, the Khmer Rouge replied to Vietnam that it did not want any special relationship; normal relations were more than enough.

If the analysts of the Indochinese Communist Party's remarks that the Khmer Communist Party had two lines are true, Pol Pot's party was definitely not the first line with good relations with Vietnam. Pol Pot implacably detested his comrade-in-arms and classmate in Hanoi. The first-line communist group also used to provide tactical support to Prince Sihanouk because of his neutrality policy. On the contrary, the second-line group, including Pol Pot, showed a nationalist policy for the Khmer Communist Party to be independent from Vietnam and adopted a policy opposing the regime of the prince.

Analysts assessed thousands of communist revolutionaries who had pursued their studies and stayed in North Vietnam since 1954 as the first-line group, with a conciliatory stance and cooperation with Prince Sihanouk. Shortly after the events of 18 March 1970, those people actively joined the Cambodian National United Front chaired by Prince Sihanouk. Since 1971, those revolutionaries had returned to Cambodia. Immediately, Pol Pot

warned them that they should be under the control of the Central Committee, commanded directly by Pol Pot. That being the case, those revolutionaries were regarded by Pol Pot as targets to be destroyed successively, according to the party's purification policy. Because of the general killing committed by Pol Pot to seize power, combined with the slaughter of the Khmer Communist Party's high-ranking officials, internal opposition movements had emerged under various small and large guises, but most of them were clandestine resistance.

Internal Resistance Movements Against Pol Pot

Since the end of 1974, a group of rebel fighters in Koh Kong province, led by Say Phuthang, Tea Banh, and Rong Phlamkesorn, with about two battalions of troops and some followers, broke away from the Pol Pot-controlled group and fled to

Thailand.¹⁶ In the Northeast, in Ratanakiri province, by the end of 1975, an anti-Pol Pot movement led by Boun My, Bou Thang, and Soey Keo had also emerged, with several followers and about two battalions of forces. Those opposition movements made Pol Pot more furious and then intensified the internal purge more savagely and extensively. Moreover, armed clashes with Vietnam occurred more frequently as well.¹⁷

Within the resistance movements to free themselves from the Pol Pot regime, the background of a regimental chief of staff, still young at that time, showed his pertinacious resolve and unflinching courage, unprecedented in Cambodia's history, to carry out the struggle until victory was achieved by completely toppling Pol Pot's regime of genocide. The background of the struggle is Hun Sen, the incumbent prime minister of the Kingdom of Cambodia and a later-generation leader from a peasant family,

¹⁶ A group of researchers, in the book entitled "Samdech Akka Moha Senapadei Techo Hun Sen, Prime Minister Born from a Peasant Family," Ponlleu Pich Printing House, Phnom Penh, 2007, p. 79.

¹⁷ Group of researchers, *ibid.*

whom almost all his political opponents miscalculated in terms of leadership capability.

Hun Sen Emerges to Oppose Pol Pot

In the wake of the 18 March 1970 event, young man Hun Bun Nal, 18 at the time, volunteered to join the Cambodia National United Front chaired by Prince Norodom Sihanouk on the royal's appeal broadcast on Beijing Radio, calling the people to run into the marquis to rise and take arms to oppose the Lon Nol-Sirimatak clique, which had staged the military coup to oust the Prince as the Head of State. When he joined that resistance movement, he changed his name to Hun Samrach. He was sent to train to become a combatant in the Cambodian People's National Liberation Armed Forces.¹⁸

¹⁸This is the official name, in that epoch, of the Cambodian People's National Liberation Armed Forces commanded by Prince Norodom Sihanouk (Forces Armées Populaires de Libération du Kampuchea), which was later named the Cambodian Revolutionary Forces.

Two weeks later, young Hun Samrach was appointed platoon commander with 36 soldiers under his command. By the end of 1974, his leadership achievements and battlefield successes earned him a promotion to battalion commander, with 500 combatants under his command. It was in this new role that the commander changed his name again from Hun Samrach to Hun Sen. A day before the troops of the Cambodian People's National Liberation Armed Forces liberated Phnom Penh from Lon Nol's Khmer Republic regime on the morning of 16 April 1975, young commander Hun Sen was injured in his left eye on the battlefield in Kampong Cham Province and sent to the hospital for treatment. During his time with the Cambodia National United Front, Hun Sen saw through the true nature of this front, which had not been led by Prince Norodom Sihanouk, but was under the complete control of the Khmer Rouge. Moreover, the massacre policy and serious human rights violations committed by the Khmer Rouge against innocent Cambodian people induced Commander Hun Sen to nurture an intense hatred of the savage auto-genocide regime and to have an idea to break away from it. In August 1975, Hun Sen was promoted to chief of staff of the regiment stationed in Region

21 in Kampong Cham province's Memot District with 2,000 soldiers under his command. His new role in the military ranks provided Hun Sen with more resources, meaning more forces to boost his chances of carrying out a struggle against the Pol Pot genocidal regime.

In that era, Khmer Rouge control was split into two: the central organization under Pol Pot's direct control and several regions. Each region was divided into sectors, and each sector into districts. In 1970-1975, each region was autonomous and had its own forces. However, since the 17 April victory, the central organization has stepped up the selection of cadres within the Cambodian Communist Party ranks. It used its power to tighten control over all the regions. Pol Pot needed to purge the eastern region's cadres, most of whom had undertaken study in Vietnam many years ago or had good relations with Hanoi. The eastern region consists of some provinces bordering Vietnam, such as Prey Veng and Svay Rieng, as well as some parts of Kampong Cham and Kandal provinces. It had So Phim as party secretary, who had opposed French colonialism in the 1940s. Besides, since

the proclamation of the Khmer Rouge's Democratic Kampuchea Constitution in April 1976,¹⁹ So Phim had been appointed vice president of the Praesidium, with Khieu Samphan as president. Also in April 1976, the chief of the eastern region's military division, named Chan Chakrey, was accused of attempting to stage a coup d'état and was arrested in May.²⁰ And due to intense torture, Chan Chakrey was forced to confess, in which he implicated some key cadres and Vietnam. In 1977, some 50 fellow combatants of Hun Sen were arrested one after the other.

At midnight on 20-21 July 1977, Hun Sen and four confidants decided to cross the border into Vietnam to ask for assistance from the army of the neighbouring country, currently in conflict with the Pol Pot regime, to liberate the Cambodian people from the Pol Pot genocide regime without delay. It should be pointed out that in that era, the Vietnamese authorities, despite Vietnam's frequent ongoing military clashes with Democratic Kampuchea,

¹⁹ The Khmer Rouge regime adopted a new constitution in January 1976, named Democratic Kampuchea.

²⁰ Chan Chakrey also held the position of party secretary for the Eastern Region's Sector 24, according to documents UN-Cambodia court.

continued to forcibly send back to Cambodia the Cambodian refugees who had stealthily crossed over the border into Vietnamese territory, except for those who had already entered deep inside important provincial towns or cities, like Saigon, and so forth. As such, Hun Sen had already envisaged that if Vietnam refused to help and sent him back to Cambodia, he would commit suicide at once, preventing himself from falling into Pol Pot's hands. In addition to the fear that the Vietnamese authorities might forcibly send him to Pol Pot, another deadly danger was the landmines planted everywhere along the Cambodian-Vietnamese border that might unexpectedly cause injuries while crossing it.

At two o'clock at dawn on 21 July 1977, the team of Hun Sen safely crossed the border into Vietnamese territory, where they rested, awaiting the morning to continue their trip. In the morning, Hun Sen and his team were heading to a village called Ho Ly in Loc Ninh District. Those brave people arrived there at about half past two in the afternoon. In general, the fate of Cambodian nationals who illegally crossed the border into neighbouring countries was not much different. They were detained,

interrogated, and jailed for a while before the neighbouring countries' authorities made final decisions on each case. In that period, Cambodians who crossed the border into Thai territory also had stories like those of those who crossed into Vietnam. At that time, what was different was that in Thailand the Thai authorities had secret organisations waiting to receive volunteers to serve in the anti-Pol Pot movements. At the same time, the Thai Government did not have any possibility to step forward and launch large-scale onslaughts directly to bring down the Khmer Rouge regime. As in Vietnam, it seemed that the time had not yet arrived for this country to introduce itself to help topple the Pol Pot regime. It needed to wait until after 1977, when Khmer Rouge leaders publicly declared that they were waging war against the Vietnamese aggressors and announced the severing of diplomatic ties between the two countries. Therefore, the case concerning Hun Sen was also within the context of relations between Vietnam and Democratic Kampuchea during that era. As the Vietnamese authorities suspected his group of being soldiers coming to collect intelligence for Pol Pot, they interrogated them repeatedly, moving from one place to another, from the Ho Ly village office to the jail in

Loc Ninh district. They were even incarcerated in Song Be province's military prison for 22 days. Thanks to their repeated statements and Hun Sen's unequivocal understanding of problems and military geography, the Vietnamese authorities then began to believe that he was truly a senior army officer seeking assistance to wage a struggle against the Pol Pot genocidal regime.

On September 27, 1977, Hun Sen was permitted to meet with a high-ranking military officer, a general of the Vietnamese Army Headquarters, and a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of Vietnam. At that meeting, Hun Sen asked Vietnam to stop handing over refugees crossing into Vietnamese territory to Pol Pot and to grant political asylum to any Khmer Rouge cadres intending to escape the genocidal regime and live in Vietnam. The Vietnamese authorities accepted the two-point request straightaway. Moreover, Hun Sen persistently asked Vietnam to provide sanctuaries and military aid, especially weapons and supplies, to a resistance movement or to new forces to be established to mount attacks to liberate Cambodian people

from the Pol Pot regime. In fact, it was the last point that Hun Sen wanted most, for this was the main purpose of his escape as a refugee to Vietnam at that time. Nonetheless, Vietnam refused because it wanted to avoid being accused of interfering in Cambodia's internal affairs. This position disappointed Hun Sen deeply.

In 1977, the Vietnamese and Khmer Rouge troops repeatedly engaged in large-scale clashes with each other. In particular, in April, when the Khmer Rouge troops launched fierce onslaughts against the Vietnamese town of Tinh Bien and some villages in the Mekong Delta province of An Giang, killing many civilians, Vietnam retaliated with bombardment while trying to negotiate, but in vain. On September 24, 1977, the Khmer Rouge launched a second large-scale attack on Tay Ninh, causing many deaths among civilians. In October, the Vietnamese troops retaliated violently in Svay Rieng province. In December, the Vietnamese forces continued to conduct large-scale attacks along the borders of Kampong Cham, Kratie, and Takeo provinces, inflicting heavy defeats on the Khmer Rouge troops. In the counterattack, the

Vietnamese troops occupied the Snuol District of Kratie Province and Tramoung,²¹ Ponhea Krek, Tbong Khmum, and Memot Districts of Kampong Cham Province. Taking advantage of this, Hun Sen personally inspected the situation in Cambodian territory. However, he was strongly disappointed because the Vietnamese troops withdrew without allowing the anti-Khmer Rouge movement to use the areas as sanctuaries to build troops or as their liberated zone. Anyway, the young commander was, all the same, partly happy because the Vietnamese forces allowed Cambodian refugees fleeing to Vietnam to live on their territory.

Khmer Rouge Sever Diplomatic Relations

On December 31, 1977, Khieu Samphan, president of the Democratic Kampuchea Praesidium, denounced Vietnam's aggression publicly, while the Khmer Rouge Foreign Minister Ieng

²¹ At present, the Tramoung District is incorporated into the Memot district.

Sary announced severing diplomatic relations with Vietnam. The dispute between the Pol Pot Khmer Rouge regime and Vietnam reached a new stage that required the latter to adopt a policy of openly supporting the Cambodian resistance movements while vehemently opposing the genocidal regime.

According to publications of the Western press issued in that era, in January 1978, the Vietnamese forces attacked and pursued the Khmer Rouge troops 30-40 kilometres deep inside Cambodia. Cambodian refugees arriving at Ben Sang camp in Tay Ninh Province at the same time said that some 10,000 Cambodians had crossed the border into Vietnam. In that camp, Cambodian Communist Party members educated in Hanoi organised political meetings. Issues such as voluntary return to Cambodia to attack the Pol Pot regime, to take revenge for the killing of their parents, siblings, children, and grandchildren, or to change the Democratic Kampuchea Government were brought up for discussion. The camp was also the site for reeducation of Cambodian soldiers captured by Vietnam, who would be educated to amend

themselves into good citizens, understand the true nature of Pol Pot, and become genuine Marxist-Leninist cadres.

Also in January, Pol Pot intensified the purging in the eastern region, while Hun Sen, in Vietnam, met with a high-ranking officer, the commander of the 7th Military Region, and a representative of the Vietnamese Party and State, who informed him that the Vietnamese government permitted Hun Sen to build troops to be recruited from among the Cambodian refugees. The Vietnamese side would provide military aid, including weapons, ammunition, supplies, training, and financial assistance. As regards political issues, Vietnam asked the Cambodian side to resolve them itself. With strong support, Hun Sen then began to accept renegade Khmer Rouge cadres and build forces successively.

On March 14, 1978, the Pol Pot Khmer Rouge troops mounted an attack on Moat Chruk or Chau Doc province, causing deaths and injuries among dozens of Vietnamese civilians. Along with this, the Democratic Kampuchea radio station made known the resolve of the Pol Pot Khmer Rouge cadres to root out agents and servants of the expansionists and Vietnamese aggressors from all

units and from Cambodian territory forever. While the cleansing in the eastern region became more savage, the wriggling out in the interior became more active. General revolt movements occurred throughout the entire eastern region. Following the demise of So Phim, the anti-Pol Pot movements in this region were led by Heng Samrin and Chea Sim. In April 1978, hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese troops reportedly massed along the Vietnamese-Cambodian border. Vietnam appealed to the Khmer Rouge soldiers to rise and take up arms to oppose the Khmer Rouge genocidal leaders. Vietnam's new strategy was very fruitful because there were also widespread seething uprisings inside the Khmer Rouge regime.

Kampuchean United Front for National Salvation

In November 1978, while hundreds of thousands of Cambodian citizens fled to Vietnam, the anti-Pol Pot resistance forces met to discuss setting up a political organisation to lead the struggle to topple the Pol Pot regime. Four groups of rebel fighters

then met. They included: 1) the group of uprising forces in the eastern region represented by Heng Samrin and Chea Sim; 2) the group in the northeastern region led by Boun My and Bou Thang; 3) the group of new renegades led by Hun Sen; and 4) the group of cadres staying in Vietnam since the Geneva Conference of 1954, consisting of Pen Sovan, Ros Samay, and Mok Sakun. As for the fifth group, led by Say Phuthang, it agreed to join the struggle but had not yet revealed itself.

At that time, the new forces of Hun Sen, starting as a company, grew speedily into 28 battalions with some 10,000 troops. On December 2, 1978, the five groups of freedom fighters proclaimed the establishment of the Kampuchean United Front for National Salvation, with Heng Samrin as president. On December 25, 1978, 50,000 Vietnamese troops, together with some 20,000 forces of the Kampuchean United Front for National Salvation, called Heng Samrin troops, launched large-scale attacks into Cambodia and captured Phnom Penh completely on January 7, 1979. Pol Pot and his special Khmer Rouge troops fled to the border with Thailand, where they received support from China and

Thailand to regroup their forces and continue to wage a war they called “national liberation war.” On January 8, 1979, the Kampuchean United Front for National Salvation formed a provisional government called the Cambodian People’s Revolutionary Council, with Heng Samrin as chairman, Pen Sovan as vice chairman and defense minister, Hun Sen as member and foreign minister, Chea Sim as member and interior minister, and five other members holding key posts, such as the minister of information, news, and culture; the minister of education; the minister of social affairs and health; and the minister of economy and livelihood. On January 11, 1979, the leaders of the front and the Cambodian People’s Revolutionary Council arrived in Phnom Penh.

Pol Pot Requests Prince Sihanouk's Help

After he resigned from the post of Head of State of Democratic Kampuchea in March 1976, the Khmer Rouge discarded him.²² The Pol Pot clique publicly attacked the Prince's Sangkum Reas Niyum regime, saying it was a despotic feudal regime, and purged and slaughtered almost all the pro-Sihanouk people. Aside from barring him from leaving his residence, the Pol Pot Khmer Rouge also murdered the royal family, including five of his children and 14 grandchildren.²³ When the Khmer Rouge needed him, they made sure to provide him with food. However, when they were no longer in need of the royal, they did not care about him in the least. Prince Sihanouk published a book entitled "Prisoners of the Khmer Rouge," which he wrote in 1986. In the book, he said that he had been aware of the dispute between

²² Prince Norodom Sihanouk, who had resigned from his post as Head of State in March 1976, was replaced by Khieu Samphan as Chairman of the Presidium of Democratic Kampuchea when the new constitution went into effect.

²³ Norodom Sihanouk, *les Prisonniers des Khmer Rouge*, Edition Cameron, 1986, p. 320.

Democratic Kampuchea and Vietnam because he had listened to news broadcasts from international radio stations, such as the British BBC, Beijing radio, France Inter, Australian radio, or German radio, and so forth, with a radio set that Khieu Samphan had given to him.

On January 1, 1978, after he unusually woke up late because he took sleeping pills in the evening, and after he listened to a radio, broadcasting that Democratic Kampuchea had broken diplomatic ties with Vietnam and pushed back the invading troops from Cambodian territory, the Prince hurriedly wrote a letter to the respected Khmer Rouge organization, in Khmer, “Angkar” extolling it for the success that the Cambodian Revolutionary Forces had achieved and saying that he had readied himself to serve the organization or Angkar in case the motherland needed him.²⁴ The next morning, the organization or Angkar, in a radio broadcast, praised the Prince but refrained from mentioning that he had volunteered to serve the Khmer Rouge anew. Prince Sihanouk

²⁴ Norodom Sihanouk, *les Prisonniers des Khmer Rouge*, *ibid*, p. 248.

noted that between January 1, 1978 and December 1 of the same year, Vietnam constantly made announcements on Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh radios, calling for settlement of problems through negotiations. In its response, the Pol Pot Khmer Rouge radio said there was no talk whatsoever because Vietnam encroached upon and invaded innocent, peace-loving Democratic Kampuchea. The Prince also noted that whenever the dispute grew bigger and bigger, his fridge would be filled up with fine foods because the Khmer Rouge paid more and more attention to him.

On the afternoon of January 5, 1979, Praesidium Head Khieu Samphan invited Prince Sihanouk from his residence behind Botum Vaddey Pagoda to meet Pol Pot at the Government House at Wat Phnom, which is now the office of the Cambodia Development Council (CDC). The prince met Pol Pot only once in 1973 when he visited a liberated zone during the war against the Lon Nol regime. Since then, he has never met the top leader of the genocidal regime again. Therefore, this was the second meeting. When he arrived, Pol Pot, who had been waiting for the prince at the large entrance with Ieng Sary and former Prime Minister Penn

Nouth, who had arrived there first, greeted him with a broad smile. It surprised Prince Sihanouk that Pol Pot, before embracing him perfunctorily, clasped both hands and bent his knees slightly to salute him.²⁵ As for Ieng Sary, he clasped his hands reluctantly, but not arrogantly, not bend at all to salute the prince, who was the former king. Pol Pot then invited the prince to sit on his right on a thick chair reserved for high-level guests, heads of state, or heads of government. A young Khmer Rouge staff member in elegant attire briskly served the guests with tea, sweets, and fresh orange juice. The prince described in his book that, as he had not had them for a long time, the sweets and orange juice were very delicious, tempting him to drink more than 10 glasses of juice repeatedly during the more than four hours of talks.²⁶

In fact, the reason Pol Pot wanted to see him was to ask Prince Sihanouk, verbally, whether he agreed to go out to defend Democratic Kampuchea at the United Nations, as reported by

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid

Khieu Samphan, in the face of the vigorous attacks and speedy advance of the Vietnamese troops.

According to what Pol Pot told him, the prince should go to the United Nations and return to Beijing no later than three months, the period of time during which Pol Pot guessed that the Khmer Rouge could attack to drive out all the Vietnamese troops from Cambodian soil. Therefore, in such an emergency, Pol Pot was still boastful and still thought that his soldiers could withstand the Vietnamese troops. Actually, Prince Sihanouk was very pleased with the idea of letting him go to the United Nations because it would be a possibility for the prince to seek freedom once again. After stepping down from the head of state post in 1976, he used to ask for permission to travel to Beijing for medical treatment, but the Khmer Rouge refused.

At the meeting, Pol Pot informed Prince Sihanouk that tomorrow afternoon a Chinese plane would come to fly the Prince, Princess Monique, his sons, and members of his royal family, as well as his entourage, to China. At that time, Ieng Sary said to Pol Pot that the Chinese plane did not have enough seats for

everybody. It had seats for only the Prince and the Princess. However, Pol Pot emphatically told Ieng Sary to ask the Chinese side to help find enough seats for everyone to leave.

Returning to his residence, Prince Sihanouk still felt afraid that Ieng Sary's remark that the plane did not have enough seats for everybody was the Khmer Rouge's trick to keep his sons and other royal family members as hostages, preventing him from having the freedom to act as he desired. The next morning, January 6, only after seeing Ieng Sary send a messenger to inform him that the plane had enough seats for all to leave, could the royal breathe a sigh of relief. In addition to this good news, Pol Pot also offered him USD 20,000 as a mission allowance. Prince Sihanouk, Princess Monique,²⁷ his two sons²⁸ and family members, and the entourage, arrived in China safely on the night of January 6.²⁹ On the night of January 7, China hosted a greeting

²⁷ At that time, Princess Monique Sihanouk held the title of Neak Moneang (a prince's spouse), but had not yet been promoted to that of Samdech (the highest royal title).

²⁸ The Prince's sons were HM King Sihamoni and HRH Samdech Norindrapong, who died in France in 2003.

²⁹ Norodom Sihanouk, *les Prisonniers des Khmer Rouge*, *ibid.*

banquet for the prince, but the Chinese were instead concerned about the collapse of the Pol Pot regime.

On January 8, 1979, Prince Sihanouk held a six-hour news conference in Beijing in the presence of 200 international correspondents, primarily to defend the right cause of Democratic Kampuchea, the victim of aggression by the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. However, in the end, the press conference then turned into a forum for the prince to denounce the Khmer Rouge genocidal regime vehemently by means of serious questions posed by those international journalists.

After that, Prince Sihanouk and his wife, as well as high-ranking Khmer Rouge officials, including Thiuonn Prasith and Keat Chhon, travelled to New York to attend the UN Security Council conference on the invasion of Democratic Kampuchea by the Vietnamese troops, as promised by Pol Pot.³⁰ On his trip to New York, Prince Sihanouk gauged the magnitude of the international public opinion's abhorrence of the Pol Pot regime. His acceptance

³⁰ Ibid

of the role of spokesperson or representative of the regime did not heighten his honour. The loss of his sons, daughters, grandchildren, and loved ones utterly demoralised him. Besides, albeit already being in a disastrously appalling situation, the Khmer Rouge still adopted an egotistic attitude toward the prince. This intensified his decision to break away from the Pol Pot clique to free himself and seek greater freedom.

Khmer Rouge's Arrogance Toward the Prince

In that book, Sihanouk wrote that the last two drops causing the water to spill from the glass were the unbearable reasons that led him to seek freedom from Khmer Rouge control and surveillance.³¹ The first drop of water: Thieuon Prasith told the Prince that his duty and mission at the UN Security Council and later at the UN General Assembly must succeed, for since 1975,

³¹ Ibid.

Comrade Ieng Sary had already mustered respect, regard, and great support from the majority of the members for Democratic Kampuchea. Hearing such a boastful remark, Prince Sihanouk thought that if the Pol Pot regime were truly popular on the international arena and if Pol Pot did not need him, Pol Pot would not have asked him to travel abroad, or he might also have killed him. The second drop of water: the prince received a message from Beijing informing him that after completing the debate at the UN Security Council, he was asked to continue to "temporarily" lead the Democratic Kampuchea delegation to the 34th UN General Assembly before the rightful head of delegation, meaning Ieng Sary, arrived in New York. This point was unacceptable to the former king and head of state. Definitely, he could no longer accompany the Khmer Rouge leaders, specifically Ieng Sary, an individual held in contempt by the whole world and most disgusted. The prince could not accept being just the deputy head under Ieng Sary. These two points were why Prince Sihanouk decided to break away from the Khmer Rouge.

FBI Helps Free the Prince

After completing his mission at the UN Security Council, at 2 o'clock in the early morning of January 14, 1979, with a prearranged rendezvous with the US FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation), Prince Sihanouk secretly slipped out of the largest and most expensive hotel in New York with a small amount of luggage. He travelled by car to the office of the US permanent representative at the United Nations, headed by Ambassador Andrew Young.³² On the morning of January 14, US authorities also helped take Princess Monique to join him safely. Before leaving the Khmer Rouge, the Princess returned the USD 20,000 mission allowance to the high-ranking Khmer Rouge officials. Actually, Ambassador Andrew Young also paid attention to freeing the Prince and the Princess from the Pol Pot Khmer Rouge authority by sending them to a large hospital in New York to have their health checked. After arriving at the hospital, Prince Sihanouk

³² Ibid. P. 342.

and his wife continued to search for freedom. Suddenly, the royal wrote a letter to request asylum in the United States. However, after receiving no answer from the United States, he then asked France to grant them two French passports: one for himself and another for his consort, the Princess, as he no longer wanted to hold Khmer Rouge passports. Anyway, France replied that it would grant him asylum on the condition that he refrained from political activities and from talking to the press on French soil. He was not happy with the reply at all. Coincidentally, Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping, who was visiting the United States, asked Prince Sihanouk to return to China.

Finally, the Prince Agrees to Return to China

Prince Sihanouk wrote in his diary, translated into English by Julio A. Jeldres,³³ that on 31 January 1979, Deng Xiaoping invited the prince to dinner at the State Guesthouse, Blair House, in Washington. On that occasion, the Chinese leader asked the prince to act again as leader of the Great National United Front and head of state of Democratic Kampuchea. He told the royal that all Democratic Kampuchea leaders had now promised not to repeat those mistakes. Moreover, those Khmer Rouge leaders had acknowledged their mistakes because, following the 1975 victory, they had disbanded the Cambodian National United Front, reaping benefits only for their side, according to Deng Xiaoping. However, the Prince declined the proposal despite Deng Xiaoping's attempted explanation.

³³ Norodom Sihanouk, *Shadow over Angkor, Memoirs of His Majesty the King of Cambodia*, translated by Ambassador Julio A. Jeldres, Monument Books, Phnom Penh, 2005, pp. 205-206.

In the end, the Chinese leader gave up the idea of asking Prince Sihanouk to assume the post of head of state again and stopped involving him further with the Khmer Rouge. However, the only point that Deng Xiaoping insisted on was that the prince return and stay in China until he could go back to Cambodia. He also assured the prince that the Chinese Government would provide him with all manner of freedom in China and allow him to make visits outside China until he could return to Cambodia. That was the reason why Prince Sihanouk agreed to return to China, as, this time, a man free of the Khmer Rouge's control forever.³⁴

Both Happiness and Fear for 7 January Victory

The Cambodian community in France, like the entire Cambodian people, celebrated the fall of the Khmer Rouge regime. However, the news that hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese

³⁴ Norodom Sihanouk, *ibid.*

troops, who had helped topple the Pol Pot regime, occupied Cambodian soil turned the celebration and delight of the Cambodian community into worry and fear over the loss of the entire territory. In fact, most overseas Cambodians seemed not to think of the devastation of Pol Pot's return to power. The Cambodian overseas community acknowledged that the Khmer Rouge had certainly committed the crime of massacring the Cambodian people. Still, the Vietnamese troops' occupation of Cambodia was a sign of the loss of the Cambodian soul. The repudiation of this foreign invasion brought into being the spirit of patriotism and nationalism among overseas Cambodians, who then gathered in groups and associations and were prompted to get involved in political activities anew. In that epoch, the general tendency abroad was that Vietnam encroached upon Cambodia, not came to help free the Cambodian people from the genocidal regime. The majority of overseas Cambodians, including myself, failed to conceive that, if there had been no genocide, there would have been no foreign aggression either. Besides, if we waited for groups of freedom fighters in the West, relying on Thailand, to come to rescue, we didn't know how many more years we'd have

to wait, since Thailand, at the time, leaned toward China, the staunchest backer of Pol Pot. At that time, Thailand did not have either the political will or the military means to launch an attack to liberate the Cambodian people from Pol Pot's genocidal regime. As such, how many more tens of thousands of innocent Cambodians could Pol Pot further slaughter if we waited for the resistance fighters on the Thai border to come to liberate the Cambodian people ?

Because of their perception of foreign occupation, many anti-Vietnamese occupation movements were self-proclaimed in France in early 1979. They held many meetings in many places at once. I too was invited to a meeting. The invitation I received through the mail at that time did not indicate the name of any organising entity. It mentioned only the date, venue, and subject matter of the meeting. The address of the meeting venue, a doubtful place, was on Faubourg Saint-Denis Street. After arriving at the place, I dared not enter straight away, because it was a sex shop selling books and gadgets, and inside there were only two or three people. I paced and hesitated because I thought the place

should not be where the country's political issues would be discussed. When I decided to enter, a Cambodian seller told me to go inside, where I saw four or five young Cambodians, never known to me before, probably my age, discussing Vietnam's aggression against Cambodia. I was terribly disappointed, because I neither heard anything of significance nor any well-defined strategies that might transform patriotic or nationalist words into concrete activities or actions in the struggle against the Vietnamese aggression troops. Besides, I could not focus on the discussion of national problems in the presence of obscene books piled up and pictures hung here and there. I perceived that between Cambodia and Vietnam, there certainly was bitter hostility, because even in such a sex shop, politics and the struggle against Vietnam were also discussed. At that time, most of our overseas Cambodians refused to accept the idea that the Vietnamese troops had come to help liberate Cambodia from the massacre committed by the Pol Pot genocidal regime.

Celebration of the Royal's Survival

A large number of Cambodians, including Son Sann, breathed a sigh of relief when they learned that Prince Sihanouk had survived and escaped from the Vietnamese troops. On January 8, Son Sann sent a message, on behalf of the elders in France, to the prince, saying, "Their Excellencies Nong Kimny, Nhiek Tioulong, Chai Thoul, Thonn Ouk, and I have learned with great satisfaction of Your Royal Highness's arrival in Beijing." Stop. The majority of overseas Cambodian compatriots, including high-ranking army officers, have faith in Samdech (Your Royal Highness) to urgently drive out the Pol Pot regime condemned by the entire world and to secure the withdrawal of all the North Vietnamese troops from Cambodia, moving toward achieving national unity within the framework of a genuinely impartial and independent Cambodia. Stop. With utmost respect, Stopend.

Signed: Son Sann.³⁵ Aware that Prince Sihanouk had gone to New York, Son Sann then travelled to the United States to meet him. However, when Son Sann arrived at the New York hotel, the secret US agents had already freed the prince and taken him to a hospital where he could not be met. Son Sann could only meet him by phone.

Son Sann's High Politics

After returning from New York at the end of January 1979, Son Sann sent General Dien Del to Thailand and then to the battlegrounds along the Cambodian-Thai border to regroup all the scattered resistance forces into a national united army with a view to liberating the nation. Son Sann later told us that he had informed Prince Sihanouk by phone of the decision to form resistance forces and asked him to lead the to-be-formed national

³⁵ Son Sann, Télégramme 00740 de, a S.A.R Norodom Sihanouk, c/o Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, le 8 Octobre 1979, RP Chine, Pékin.

liberation resistance movement. According to Son Sann, Prince Sihanouk declined to lead this movement because he had no intention of conducting any political activities at that time. However, Son Sann pointed out that the prince was not against creating this resistance movement, but only asked that his name not be used.

Through General Dien Del, Son Sann sent a letter to the leaders of all Sereika combatants, advising them that he had assigned Dien Del to form a national liberation army to regroup all fighters along the border before moving toward establishing a political organisation to lead the national liberation resistance. Son Sann indicated that if this were not heeded, all the combatants could not hope to receive aid from friendly countries. Therefore, aid was the key factor in attracting and marshalling forces, because without outside aid, those combatants would have no hope of carrying out any significant activities.

In reality, Son Sann convinced and appealed to the leaders of all the border resistance fighters to unite and create an army on an anti-Vietnamese front. General Dien Del, whose war name was

Del Davy, travelled from Paris as Son Sann's emissary to present the latter's message to the Sereika fighters on the battlefield. The general succeeded, as almost all Sereika combatant groups welcomed him.

On March 5, 1979, 16 Cambodian freedom fighters met on Cambodian territory.³⁶ All of them were resistance group leaders. They included: 1. Im Chhoodeth, 2. Keth Reth, 3. Sok Serey, 4. Kravanh Phal, 5. Moharay, 6. Luch Phay, 7. Tunn (Tuon) Chay, 8. Sen Sok Reaksmei, 9. Del Davy, 10. Sek Sam Iet, 11. Keo Saovuth, 12. Chhay Seila or Mau Ham, 13. Muon Sophorn, 14. Nhem Phuong, 15. Ben Vy, and 16. Siem Sam Onn. The 16 leaders agreed to form an army named the Khmer People's National Liberation Armed Forces (KPNLAF). They all signed a statement establishing this army and outlined the reasons for its formation. They also appealed to Cambodians of all political leanings to join the Sereika freedom fighters to create a military and political front, later known as the Khmer People's National Liberation Front

³⁶ KPNLF Bulletin No. 4, March 12, 1983, p.1

(KPNLF), to liberate Cambodia from foreign occupation and allow the Cambodian people to choose a political regime to rule the country freely. Those Sereika fighters requested that Son Sann be their leader with the mission to unite Cambodian compatriots.³⁷ They gave him full power to fulfil this mission. However, in their statement, those Sereika combatants left the door open for Prince Sihanouk, who might, one day, want to join the resistance groups by offering him the possibility of leading any one of the resistance movements. In their statement, the groups of Sereika fighters mainly said, "The KPNLF will serve any Cambodian personality who adopts these principles and is susceptible to forming a union of all Cambodians to face the foreign invasion, and for the rational reconstruction of our Motherland, ravaged by years of raving madness, with a view to returning to peace, independence, well-being, and happiness for the Cambodian people who have so much suffered since 1970." At that time, the personality they aimed at was definitely Prince Sihanouk. After receiving the

³⁷ Ibid, Declaration of the KPNLAF, March 5, 1979, p. 3.

request of those Sereika fighters, Son Sann had not yet made a decision. He took about two months to consider whether he should lead those Sereika fighters. He also hesitated, for he was not yet sure of Prince Sihanouk's intentions: would he come to lead the resistance movement? Afterwards, on April 29, 1979, Son Sann, who was 68, agreed to the 16 resistance fighters' requests to lead the KPNLF.

Those decisions taken by Son Sann were all “high politics” that nobody was aware of, except for a handful of his confidants. Most association members were unaware of these secrets, including this issue and Son Sann’s secret trip to New York to meet Prince Sihanouk. Son Sann convened a meeting of active members to share information only after he returned from New York. Actually, Son Sann and his confidants managed information very well, knowing what needed to be divulged and what needed to be kept confidential. They only let those who were genuinely loyal to them, specifically those who had gained the trust of Son Sann’s family, know information openly or secretly. When Son Sann sent General Dien Del to the Cambodian-Thai border, he did

not tell us. In reality, we young people who volunteered to work with him never demanded to know anything confidential. However, sometimes we were taken aback when secrets that we received and that he had kept tightly were leaked outside of our association, making us feel terribly ashamed. We felt ashamed because, although we worked directly with him, we did not know about any major issues, while outsiders received confidential information in a timely fashion.

Son Sann and Prince Sihanouk Adopt Different Paths

On April 8, 1979, the AGKE Association held its first assembly, at which Son Sann was officially elected president of the association, with former cabinet minister Nong Kimny as vice president and Truong Mealy as secretary general. Former finance minister Chai Thoul and I (Ieng Mouly) had been appointed as

auditors.³⁸ This association continued its activities as usual. That is, it heightened and protected national culture and Buddhism, sought aid from other Cambodian communities in France, and assisted Cambodian refugees who had just arrived. However, secretly, this association began recruiting volunteers to serve in the national liberation resistance movement.

As for Prince Sihanouk, he seemed hesitant at first about conducting any political activities, but he later changed his mind. Perhaps he perceived that the Khmer People's National Liberation Armed Forces was a military group formed by republican army generals who had ousted him in 1970, whom he could not pardon. Perhaps, because he had seen that the Son Sann group consisted mostly of republicans, he had then refrained from responding to Son Sann's proposal. At that time, the prince stayed in both Beijing and Pyongyang in North Korea, where his great friend, Marshal Kim Il-sung, offered him a sumptuous residence.

³⁸ Net Kuon and Say Bory, minutes of the bureau organizing the election of the central committee for 1979-80 dated 8/4/79.

The prince's decision to return to politics and his refusal to lead the resistance forces led by Son Sann forced some AGKE members, who were staunch Sihanoukists or from the royal family, such as Princess Norodom Vacheahra, to quit the association. As a result, the royal ballet troupe in Paris split into two: one pro-Sihanouk and the other pro-Son Sann. The non-communist associations in France were also divided into two, like the royal ballet troupe.

In July 1979, Prince Sihanouk sent his first message to his overseas fellow compatriots, expressing his disappointment with the United Nations, which had refused to allow him to speak on the Cambodian refugees' behalf and to present his plan for resolving Cambodian problems. In a message dated July 12, 1979, from Pyongyang, the Prince proposed the immediate creation of the Kampuchean United Front for National Salvation and the Provisional Government of an Independent and Neutral Cambodia, respectively called FUKSANA (Front Uni Khmer pour le Salut National) and GOUPECIN (Gouvernement Provisoire de l'Etat du

Cambodge Indépendant) in French,³⁹ The Prince asked all overseas Cambodian associations to join FUKSANA and assign representatives to attend a national congress to be held in France or the United States. At the congress, Prince Sihanouk would officially propose his candidacy as the front president and foreign minister of the GOUPECIN.

In his second message issued on the same day, the prince proposed that the new principle of Cambodia's Constitution not opt for a monarchy or a republic, but that the short word "Cambodia" be used. The head of state should be called the head of state of Cambodia, who should be appointed officially after a general election to be held under the supervision of the United Nations and of the members of the National Assembly and the Senate. The national flag and anthem should be the same as the pre-1970 military coup ones, but only the second stanza of the anthem, from the sentence "the stone temple hidden in the middle of the jungle...", should be used. In the political platform of the front and

³⁹ Norodom Sihanouk, (Message du Prince), A Tous Ses Compatriotes à l'Etranger, Pyongyang, le 12 juillet 1979.

government he proposed, the prince asked for mentions of respect for human rights and the UN Charter, Western-style 100 per cent respect for democratic rights, freedom of movement for national and international journalists, and so forth. As for foreign policy, Prince Sihanouk proposed using the principle of Pancasila and maintaining good relations and cooperation with all countries of the world, except Israel and South Korea under Park Chung-hee.

Also in this second message, Prince Sihanouk asked that he be appointed prime minister and foreign minister, and he said that if he were appointed as proposed, he would take, as prime minister and foreign minister, diplomatic and friendly measures to try to get the Vietnamese troops to withdraw from Cambodia without the shedding of Cambodian blood.⁴⁰

On the same day, July 12, 1979, the prince sent his third message appealing to the Cambodian parties in armed conflict to drop their weapons and stop their ideological struggle, inviting Pol

⁴⁰ Norodom Sihanouk, (Deuxième Message du Prince) A Tous Ses Compatriotes à l'Etranger, Pyongyang, le 12 juillet 1979.

Pot, Ieng Sary, and other people responsible for the genocidal regime to leave safely for China. He also invited the Heng Samrin-led group to return to Saigon and Hanoi.⁴¹

Many AGKE Association members were unhappy with Prince Sihanouk's new initiative, especially his plan to create a new front when they had already established the Khmer People's National Liberation Armed Forces, which would be led politically by the Khmer People's National Liberation Front. Son Sann disclosed in the proclamation of the Khmer People's National Liberation Armed Forces that this army was prepared to serve a strong personality, meaning to serve Prince Sihanouk. At that time, Son Sann, a former prime minister under Prince Sihanouk, convened a meeting of the members to discuss the prince's proposal. The idea of taking diplomatic and friendly measures to try to get the Vietnamese troops to pull out of Cambodia without the shedding of Cambodian blood caused Son Sann's family and the people

⁴¹ Norodom Sihanouk, (Troisième Message du Prince) A Tous Ses Compatriotes à l'Etranger, Pyongyang, le 12 juillet 1979.

around him to feel unhappy, because they believed that without strong military pressure, the Vietnamese troops would definitely not pull out of Cambodia.

Despite this, Prince Sihanouk continued to send messages to his compatriots one after another. In one message, he asked for the appointment of his former advisers, namely Nhiek Thioulong and Son Sann, to prepare the political program and the declaration on the establishment of his national united front. Those drafts would be presented to the national congress for adoption. However, news about reactions and displeasure from Paris, which he received at that time, showing no support for his initiative, made him unhappy.

In his 8th message, the prince said, "In Paris, my enemies are slandering me to sabotage the plan to organise the national congress and the formation of a provisional government that I have proposed." "I do not have any personal ambition." "Thanks to the special great friendship that I have with the People's Republic of China and Marshal Kim Il-sung, my living, be it physical, morale, or material, is more bountiful and happier than in the 1950s and

1960s.” “My palace in Pyongyang is five times bigger and more sumptuous than Khemarin Great Palace.” The great palace of Khemarin was his residence in the Phnom Penh Royal Palace.⁴² In his 9th message, dated July 21, 1979, Prince Sihanouk made known the difference between his position and Son Sann’s. That is, he planned to form and lead a political party different from Son Sann’s in any future elections.⁴³ In the end, the AGKE decided to reply to the prince’s letter of invitation.

Son Sann did not want to get involved in verbal clashes with Prince Sihanouk. However, his wife, who strongly opposed Prince Sihanouk at that time, regarded him as completely responsible for Cambodia’s destiny, which faced a grave crisis. She blamed the prince for being influenced by people around him, including his wife, Princess Monique, and her mother, Mrs Pom, as the ringleader. In reality, Mrs Son Sann was devotedly loyal to

⁴² Norodom Sihanouk, (Huitième Message du Prince) A Tous Ses Compatriotes à l’Etranger, Pyongyang, undated.

⁴³ Norodom Sihanouk, (Neuvième Message du Prince) A Tous Ses Compatriotes à l’Etranger, Pyongyang, le 21 juillet 1979.

Princess Norleak, another consort of Prince Sihanouk. Contrary to Princess Monique, who was born to a commoner's family, Princess Norleak was born to a royal family. Moreover, Queen Kossomak, Prince Sihanouk's mother, cherished the princess. Prince Sihanouk sometimes lived at the Chamkar Mon residence with Princess Monique since the early 1960s. Therefore, within the association, some opposed, and others supported Prince Sihanouk's proposal to convene the national congress. In the end, the association decided to assign young members to write reply letters to the prince. I (Ieng Mouly) was in charge of writing the letters in Cambodian.

The association fully approved my draft letter. In my reply letter to Prince Sihanouk, I expressed my gratitude for the attention he was paying to the nation's destiny despite countless obstacles. I affirmed the resolve of all of us in the liberation of Cambodia from Vietnam's yoke of aggression. I also underlined the complete solidarity of all the patriotic forces, except for the Khmer Rouge. In the letter, I opined that the enemies were employing tricks to induce the Cambodians to engage in conflict

with one another. The letter was dated August 8, 1979, and signed by Truong Mealy⁴⁴ as AGKE Association secretary general and representative of this association's youth from Paris, Toulouse, Lille, Provence, Côte d'Azur, and the City of Tours. Truong Mealy would present the letter to Prince Sihanouk in Pyongyang and attend the national congress to be held there.

Finally, the congress took place in September 1979 in North Korea, not in France or the United States, as Prince Sihanouk had planned in his first message. Truong Mealy travelled to Pyongyang as the AGKE representative. However, after his return, Truong Mealy turned his back on the AGKE and has supported Prince Sihanouk since then. In Pyongyang, Prince Sihanouk failed to establish either the front or the provisional government as desired. The congress concluded by setting up a federation called the Nationalist Federation, chaired by Prince Sihanouk. From then on, Truong Mealy quit as AGKE secretary general to serve the pro-Sihanouk movement. Therefore, the AGKE Association elected Dr

⁴⁴ Truong Mealy, secretary-general of AGKE (to Samdech Sihanouk), Paris. August 8, 1979.

Chhay Hancheng, the son-in-law of Son Sann, secretary general, replacing Truong Mealy.

Son Sann Proclaims the KPNLF

During that time, Son Sann prepared to travel to Thailand. Accompanied by two or three of his confidants, he left Paris stealthily without notifying us. With support from the Thai military, Son Sann achieved, as desired, the official establishment of a front called the Khmer People's National Liberation Front "KPNLF."⁴⁵ This front was proclaimed on October 9, 1979, on Cambodian soil adjoining Thailand's Trat Province, on Bantoat Hill, in a village called Phunm Sok Sann, under the control of Colonel Prum Vit.

According to official documents, five nationalist movements joined the Khmer People's National Liberation Front.⁴⁶ They were:

⁴⁵ Son Sann, Front National de Libération du Peuple Khmer, Décision No. 79/01/FNL, Territoire Khmer, le 09 Octobre 1979.

⁴⁶ Proclamation of the Khmer People's National Liberation Front, Khmer Territory, October 9, 1979.

1. The United Front for the Liberation of the Republic, known as the Reaksa Sambok movement, with Reaksa Sambok as its leader; 2. the Kok Sar Movement; 3. the Khleang Moeung Movement; 4. the Nen Rong Movement; and 5. the Baksei Chamkrong Movement. The documents stated that people from 15 provinces had assigned representatives to join in the creation of the Khmer People's National Liberation Front. Son Sann had been elected president, while Chhean Vam, a democrat and former prime minister, was vice president. Shortly after that, the front issued three proclamations, which the meeting participants supported.

The first proclamation was about the creation of the Khmer People's National Liberation Armed Forces; the second was about the decision on the recognition of the Khmer People's National Liberation Armed Forces formed on March 5, 1979;⁴⁷ and the third was about the decision on the appointment of General Dien Del as its chief of staff. The organisational structure of the Khmer People's

⁴⁷ Son Sann, Front National de Libération du Peuple Khmer, Décision No. 79/02/FNL, Territoire Khmer, le 9 Octobre 1979.

National Liberation Front consisted of an executive committee, a national council, a council of elders, and a political council.⁴⁸

In his speech on the creation of the Khmer People's National Liberation Front, Son Sann stated that his willingness to accept the presidency of the Khmer People's National Liberation Front at this time was intended to get the front operating.⁴⁹ However, at a suitable time, he would propose appointing another personality to lead the front to achieve victory, because at the moment he was very old, already 68 years old. He proposed the main principles of the Front's political program: nationalism, middle-way dharma Buddhist socialism, genuine neutrality, independence, popular sovereignty, territorial integrity, good neighbourliness, and peaceful coexistence.

In the end, Son Sann appealed to Cambodian compatriots inside and outside the country to unite and marshal all national forces to liberate the nation from its enemies, urging them to set

⁴⁸ Son Sann, Front National de Libération du Peuple Khmer, Décision No. 79//01FNL, *ibid.*

⁴⁹ Son Sann, President of the Khmer People's National Liberation Front, Speech, Khmer Territory, October 9, 1979.

aside personal problems as the main issue. As regards the United Nations, the superpowers, and Southeast Asian countries, Son Sann appealed to them to help the Cambodian people get rid of North Vietnam's colony in a timely fashion by convening an international conference requested by the ASEAN countries; that is, a conference aiming at finding the solution for immediate cesase fire to allow international humanitarian organizations to provide food and medicine to Cambodia and to current Cambodian victims. He also called on the Vietnamese troops to pull out of Cambodia and to be replaced by UN forces to allow the United Nations to organise a general election. Finally, Son Sann asked that Cambodia be allowed to become a neutral country. As for Vietnam and Laos, Son Sann stated, "The Vietnamese have shipped troops into Cambodia to help free the Cambodian people from the barbaric, cruel Khmer Rouge regime. Now, the Cambodian citizens ask Vietnam to withdraw its troops from Cambodia."⁵⁰ "With aid from the United Nations and from freedom-

⁵⁰ Son Sann, Speech, *ibid.*

and human rights-loving countries, the Cambodian citizens will resolve the Khmer Rouge issue themselves. The Vietnamese and Cambodian people should join hands to put out the fire of ill fortune (Karma) that has led us to hate each other for centuries.”

To publicise the proclamation on the creation of the KPNLF, Son Sann invited Bangkok-based international journalists to cover the event directly. A few days or weeks later, the news about the establishment of the Khmer People’s National Liberation Front was advertised worldwide.

In Paris on October 12, 1979, I also attended the front-proclamation ceremony organised by the AGKE. On that occasion, Thon Ouk, a former government minister, gave a press conference in his capacity as the representative of the Khmer People’s National Liberation Front at the Meridienne Hotel. Thon Ouk disseminated news about the genocidal acts committed by the Khmer Rouge against the Cambodian people and the invasion by North Vietnamese troops, with no other purpose than to swallow the entire Cambodian territory. Several French newspapers publicised that press conference. In sum, this press conference

was a success for Son Sann and the KPNLF in public relations. At the time, the KPNLF appeared more trustworthy than the Khmer Nationalist Federation of Prince Sihanouk, created in North Korea in September 1979.

Unlike Prince Sihanouk's federation, the KPNLF was established on Cambodian soil and regrouped genuine resistance fighters under the command of a military general well known under the republican regime. In addition, in that era, Son Sann was seen as having no involvement in staging the military coup that ousted Prince Sihanouk in 1970. He had also not been involved in helping the Khmer Rouge ascend to power in 1975. The first anniversary of the KPNLF was recognised, thanks to a gathering of supporters from overseas Cambodian communities worldwide.

Nonetheless, In Tam, one of the 1970 military coup leaders who toppled Prince Sihanouk and a founding member of the AGKE, broke away from this association to join Prince Sihanouk. In Tam was unhappy with the appointment of General Dien Del as chief of staff of the Khmer People's National Liberation Armed

Forces. In Tam protested that Son Sann did not keep his promise to appoint him as the military commander when they first met to negotiate the setting up of the AGKE. Son Sann acknowledged that he had made the promise to appoint In Tam as the commander-in-chief of the Khmer People's National Liberation Armed Forces. At that time, Son Sann appointed General Dien Del as the only chief of staff, not the commander-in-chief. Due to this misunderstanding, In Tam then left Son Sann and crossed over to serve Prince Sihanouk to organise a Sihanoukist army.

On October 15, 1979, Son Sann officially issued a decree setting up several institutions similar to a small government.⁵¹ The first institution was an Executive Committee, abbreviated as COMEX in French. This committee handled key functions, including political, diplomatic, and administrative work. Each committee member had a particular area of responsibility within their function. At that time, the front established seven areas of responsibility for the Executive Committee, each with a responsible

⁵¹ Son Sann, Front National de Libération du Peuple Khmer, Décision No. 79/04/FNL, Territoire Khmer, le 15 Octobre 1979

member. They included: 1. Interior affairs, 2. Foreign affairs, 3. Military affairs, 4. Culture and Religious affairs, 5. Finance and Development, 6. Information and Propaganda, and 7. Justice. At that time, Son Sann had also appointed the members of the Executive Committee as follows: 1. Chhean Vam as vice president, 2. Neang Chin Han as secretary general, 3. Dien Del as member in charge of military affairs, 4. Im Chhoodeth, interior affairs, 5. Prum Vit, social, cultural, and religious affairs, and 6. Nguon Pytoureth, press, information, and war veterans.⁵² Mrs Suon Kaset and Son Sann's sons, Son Soubert and Son Monir, were appointed to serve on special missions of the Executive Committee.

⁵² Son Sann, Front National de Libération du Peuple Khmer, Décision No. 79/05/FNL, Territoire Khmer, le 15 Octobre 1979.

I Am a KPNLF Activist

With the creation of the KPNLF, AGKE became the front's second office in Paris, France, where Son Sann stayed from time to time between his stays on the Cambodian-Thai border and in Bangkok. In Paris, Son Sann could take diplomatic initiatives and conduct political activities. Therefore, AGKE became a branch of the KPNLF in Europe. Since then, I have not only worked for the association, but I have also had more work to do. I worked for the KPNLF as an active propagandist. I travelled indefatigably across France with Dr Chhay Hancheng to drum up support from Cambodian refugees in France for the KPNLF. Time and again, I used photos, slides, or films sent directly from Bangkok, most of them devoid of captions and explanations, to be incorporated with commentary, audio, and background music according to my knowledge. Sometimes, I also provided commentary on pictures I did not know exactly what they meant. No matter what, I tried to

improve the quality of those films to make their showing or screening professional. The participants were always satisfied. I included my vocal track in a 16mm documentary film, accompanied by Cambodian traditional music, Pin Peat, and commentary of historic significance, with the sound of music rising and falling to keep viewers engaged. As for the Cambodian refugees in France, they always looked forward to news from Cambodia after watching that film.

My documentary films made older adults unable to help but shed tears and want to return to die in Cambodia. For those dreadfully missing the country, their patriotic sentiment grew even more. Through the pictures in my film, people could see the difficulties and suffering of the KPNLF combatants and the people living in areas controlled by the KPNLF. They could see pictures of Son Sann visiting those areas. The KPNLF president appeared thinner. This helped viewers understand that the older man had likely lived permanently in those areas. We all showed him respect; at this old age, he was still willing to lead the resistance movement. Actually, in that epoch, we never thought that

President Son Sann had lived in Bangkok at any time. In fact, we received only scanty news from the front through Chhay Hancheng. Chhay Hancheng, chief of the information section, was the only person who scanned and selected news and decided who should or should not be told of news about the KPNLF activities.

In the AGKE or in the KPNLF in France, Dr Chhay Hancheng's role became more important because he was able to manage all the news in connection with the KPNLF. Some active members blamed him for not telling the truth when Son Sann and his two sons, Son Soubert and Son Monir, Mrs Suon Kaset, and Neang Chin Han had travelled from Paris to Thailand. Some other members thought that the reason the important news had not been disseminated might be because Son Sann's group distrusted them, no matter how they tried to serve the AGKE and the KPNLF. Those members understood that they should be aware of the news, because at least they had been able to take Son Sann and his children to the airport. They believed that, as those trips were patriotic missions, they should have the honour of seeing them off. As for me, at first, I too had the same feeling, because I had not

known about any important decisions or work. However, gradually, I came to think that those issues concerning the security and safety of those going to carry out the struggle might affect their lives. That was why I calmed myself down and accepted the idea that it was only the leadership's work arrangement. This showed the working style of Son Sann, who was an opinionated person, which was a factor leading to misunderstanding and mistrust within the pro-Son Sann movement all along.

Sihanouk Demands Direct Talks with Vietnam

In the meantime, I also received news from French newspapers that Prince Norodom Sihanouk, as president of the Khmer Nationalist Federation, had sent a message from his palace in Pyongyang, North Korea, to the North Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Van Dong, asking Vietnam to hold direct negotiations with him, in the sense of bringing back Cambodia's independence and neutrality. According to documents

disseminated publicly in the 1990s, Prince Sihanouk sent three messages to Prime Minister Pham Van Dong: the first dated October 7, the second October 23, and the third November 11, 1979. In the message dated October 7, 1979, the Prince recalled to the Vietnamese leader many aspects of the aid he had provided to the struggle carried out by the Vietnamese people in the war against the U.S. imperialism at the time when he had been in power, such as providing shelters for respite and treatment for the injured and sick, and authorizing the use of the Sihanouk Ville seaport to ship armaments to Vietcong combatants, and so forth. Those kinds of aid led Cambodia to be subject to the charge that it had given up its neutrality, as well as to land and air attacks from the forces of the United States and South Vietnam, to the point that the military coup was staged on 18 March 1970.

In his message, Prince Sihanouk asked the Vietnamese leader to hold talks with him to rebuild Cambodia's independence and neutrality and to restore cordial and fruitful relations between Cambodia and Vietnam and between the two peoples. The prince added that he imposed no conditions whatsoever; that is, the talks

could be held in Hanoi, Pyongyang, or Prague. Prince Sihanouk also pointed out that he was the only Cambodian leader recognised by the entire Cambodian people and representing all the patriotic Cambodians. The prince warned that there would be disastrous consequences if the Vietnamese leader refused to hold talks with him.

On October 23, Prince Sihanouk sent another message to Prime Minister Pham Van Dong. In this second message, he recalled the significance of the earlier message. Still, he complained that not only had he not received an answer from the prime minister, but the Vietnamese ambassador had even stated, in the presence of American correspondents, at a news conference in Beijing that he was just a “private person” whom the Phnom Penh government also condemned as an “enemy of the Cambodian people.” In the third message, dated November 11, 1979, the Prince asked whether this message would still not have an answer. Prince Sihanouk still insisted on talks between Vietnam and him, as a responsible statesman; otherwise, he warned, he would be forced to carry out the struggle to liberate the

nation until the end. Neither his first nor his second message received any response from Prime Minister Pham Van Dong of Vietnam. As for the third message, it was sent back unopened. Therefore, Prince Sihanouk's attempt to negotiate did not achieve the success he sought. Perhaps because the Vietnamese leader paid him no attention, Prince Sihanouk finally decided to form his own armed forces and front before joining the Khmer Rouge again in the tripartite coalition government in 1982.

Prince Sihanouk Arrives in Paris

On November 25, 1979, Prince Sihanouk arrived in Paris, where he planned to stay for three months. The French Government greeted the prince as a friend of France. Upon arriving in Paris, the prince acted as Son Sann had by appealing to all Cambodian nationalists to do their utmost to have the Cambodian nationalists recognised as the most serious group. He stated, "We should work to get the world to trust the Cambodian

nationalist group.” “This is the purpose of my three-month stay in France.” “I believe that I will achieve this goal.”

In the appeal, Prince Sihanouk also said, “A great many compatriots have insistently asked me to give up my living abroad and join them in the operation to salvage our nation, which faced with disaster. However, I wish to assert clearly that I do not come to Paris to seize power from anyone. I am just a patriot who will try to make all kinds of efforts, with other patriots and the Cambodian people, to fulfil the duty that each Cambodian patriot should perform.” The prince pointed out that his Khmer nationalist federation was implementing the policy of good cooperation with any organisations that were not members of the federation (including Son Sann’s KPNLF) as a sacred principle for national salvation.

Receiving News from My Mother

The visit by the former king and head of state strongly buoyed up the spirits of his supporters in France. Anyway, to me and to some of those backing Son Sann, the Prince's presence in France did not make us change our position, blow hot and cold, or make our minds vacillate. However, what pulled my mind, making me so excited, was a letter I received from Thailand. That letter arrived just as Prince Sihanouk was in France; it was from my sister-in-law, Tepthida, the wife of my second older brother, who had just arrived at a border camp on the Cambodian-Thai border. My sister-in-law, Tepthida, who did not have my new address in Stains Town, sent the letter, addressed to "Ieng Mouly, Moulin Vert Paris France," to my old address in Paris, with only the street name but no house number. Luckily, thanks to France's good and highly efficient mail system, the letter was forwarded to my new address in Stains Town. Before moving to this town, I had registered my new address with the old post office in Paris. That was why they could redirect the letter to my new address.

The letter written by my sister-in-law, Tepthida, was so short because she might have been in a hurry. However, she narrated the sufferings of our people and the death of my father in December 1975 and of my four siblings in 1977. She also described the hardship encountered by my mother, who was still alive. The letter inspired me to resolve to make all manner of sacrifices for the sake of freedom. The key phrase in the letter said, "Every night since the collapse of Phnom Penh, although he had been forcibly evacuated to live in the countryside, Puk (my father) still prayed to Lord Buddha to protect and bless you, young brother (me), so that you could help free us from the Khmer Rouge's dictatorial power." The real significance of this letter was the appeal to save their lives and free them so they could regain their freedom.

The True Nature of 7 January Victory

Human beings cannot live without dignity, and dignity could not be bestowed upon them if they remained enslaved. These are the main factors that have inspired them to free themselves and regain freedom. Freedom and dignity are innate natural components of human beings; they possess them from their birth to the day they leave this world. Freedom and dignity cannot be seized, robbed, or confiscated by anyone, come hell or high water.

Not only did the Pol Pot regime enslave the Cambodian people in general, but it also massacred them as a means of protecting its power. Pol Pot's proclamation that it did politics to serve the interests of the Cambodian people and the nation turned into great devastation for the entire nation and motherland. The disaster caused by Pol Pot at that time could not have been brought to an end if this genocidal regime were not toppled in a timely fashion through all kinds of measures, including seeking help and support from foreign forces. The struggle against Pol Pot took many forms, both clandestine and open. Some resistance

forces fled to the west to seek assistance from Thailand, while others fled to the east to get help from Vietnam. The resistance forces fleeing to the west, on the Cambodian-Thai border, hoped that Thailand would be able to help them overthrow Pol Pot. Nonetheless, in the geopolitical context of that epoch, Thailand did not dare show its face to help attack and bring down the Khmer Rouge, because behind this genocidal regime was China, its staunch backer. On the contrary, the resistance fighters fleeing to Vietnam had more possibilities to overthrow the regime, because Pol Pot regarded Vietnam as a hereditary enemy and frequently provoked border conflicts to the point that large-scale war broke out between them.

Along with that, Vietnam also had bitter conflicts with China. In the end, Vietnam sent troops to help attack and topple the Pol Pot regime on January 7, 1979. However, due to the centuries-long hostility between Cambodia and Vietnam, some Cambodian people, including Cambodian refugees fleeing overseas, suspected the military intervention of the neighbouring country and alleged that it was aggression against Cambodia. Nevertheless, events

emerging successively demonstrated that if the cruellest genocidal regime of Pol Pot had not existed, what was accused of being Vietnam's aggression against Cambodia would definitely not have happened.

In line with Cambodia's ups and downs, the search for genuine freedom did not retain any political colours. Both those fleeing to the west and those to the east all had the aspiration to help save the lives of all Cambodian citizens from the genocidal regime. However, the forces in the east had more possibilities and were more effective. We, the youth in that epoch, all had hearts inflamed with patriotism and hungry for freedom. Anyway, in the wake of the genocidal regime's downfall, the political activities of each of us were within the context of both the Cold War and border disputes.