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NEGOTIATIONS IN CAMBODIA

## NEGOTIATIONS IN CAMBODIA

A negotiated settlement in Cambodia is here defined as a power sharing arrangement among those Cambodian political power holders without whose active participation there would be no end to present hostilities. The paper concentrates on four major questions: a) Should the United States launch a campaign to get negotiations underway? b) What are the major factors involved in such an effort? c) What are the prospects for success (and the penalties for failure) in pressing for a negotiated settlement and d) What will happen if the U.S. does not launch such a campaign?

### I

It would appear that the U.S. is very nearly obliged to make an effort to get negotiations underway in Cambodia because of recent developments in the United Nations, that is the United States has an obligation to those countries which heeded its request for support of the ASEAN resolution to make a full honest effort to set the Cambodian negotiational machinery into motion. In part our credibility (and wisdom) is at stake. Some countries, such as India, argued against the American position on the grounds that a negotiated settlement was impossible, while we argued that it was possible.

However no one should argue that we press for negotiations simply because of the UN vote, only unless

we believe there is some chance of success. Otherwise our effort becomes a mere exercise in hypocrisy, one which fools no one and serves neither the United States nor the general cause of negotiations as a means of settling wars and other disputes elsewhere.

It also is argued sometimes that we should press for negotiations because the GKR's military position is deteriorating (or will shortly) and therefore it is better if and when the Lon Nol government crumbles that it be while negotiations are going on. The reasoning here seems specious. It is difficult to see how collapse of the GKR during U.S. efforts to achieve a negotiated settlement would rebound favorably on the United States. On the contrary the image, at least in Asia, would be American impotency rather than America the peace-seeker.

## II

There are several major factors involved in a negotiated settlement, among them:

1. Problem of Ambiguity. The paucity of reliable information about insurgent power holders -- those with whom negotiations would be conducted -- is far worse than it ever was in Vietnam or Laos. Intelligence reports on the communist apparatus and leadership system in Cambodia,

like the famous Irishman's evidence, is "chock full of omissions." We know there is not one but several insurgent forces in the field but we do not know their inter-relationships. We do know the insurgent leaders are joined at the command level by some sort of central office, but not whether it is a mere coordination center or a structured coalition arrangement or a tightly disciplined monolith. We are not certain who are all of the actual power holders, nor how they are to be ranked in power terms: Sihanouk? Khieu Samphan? Tiv Ol? Khieu Thivith? The shadowy Party figures in the background? We do not have an organizational chart, a wiring diagram as the military put it. We do not know the nature and degree of Party control exerted at the Cambodian village level. Nor how much proxy control is held by outsiders.

Because we lack such information we do not know who would be doing the negotiating, assuming all the real power holders would come forward. And because we are not sure with whom we would be dealing, we have no way to establish probable negotiational positions, what each would find acceptable and unacceptable.

2. Role of Outsiders. There are several contradictions, as the communists would phrase it, between

the insurgent forces and their allies and supporters, chiefly the DRV and the PRC, but also the USSR, and various pro-guerrilla forces around the world.

The PRC is pro-Sihanouk (for reasons not clear) but not entirely pro-insurgent. The PRC appears cool to the idea of a political settlement, although this cannot be stated for certainty. What is clear is that we have no indication at all that the PRC would use its influence to contribute actively to such a settlement. Therefore it must be set down as a negative factor.

The DRV in all probability does not want to see a clear cut insurgent victory in Cambodia and would prefer for the time being an indeterminate condition, neither victory nor defeat.

There is the contradiction between long range goals of the PRC and DRV in Indochina. There is the historical ethnic antipathy of Cambodia for Vietnamese (a mass of intelligence reports has now established beyond question that ~~relations~~ and file relations between North Vietnamese and Cambodian insurgents are so poor as to make unworkable most joint or cooperative efforts, either military or political. From this it follows most likely that the DRV would not like to see a negotiated settlement, for this would increase rather than decrease the facilitation

of its activities, and threaten its interests, in Cambodia.

The USSR is cool to Sihanouk (partly because the PRC is pro-Sihanouk) and generally stand-offish toward the insurgency. Nor does the USSR have significant influence with the various insurgent elements, assuming it would be willing to involve itself. Finally because of PRC considerations, tactically it would be unwise to seek USSR participation.

3. Internal Cambodian Scene. The soil for negotiations in Cambodia apparently is of average fertility, that is there is the usual reciprocal antagonism, mutual distrust and stubborn unwillingness to concede or share power which surround any attempt to negotiate an end to war. Estimate of negotiational progress rests on assessment of each contender of his respective advantages and weaknesses now in the military sphere and in the future in the political arena. To the degree he envisions quick military victory, to that degree the prospect of negotiated settlement is diminished. A military stand-off, particularly one in which the participants are tiring, is the single most favorable condition that could develop on the battlefield. The political factor turns on the perception of each contender as to whether a negotiated settlement would provide him with the share of political power he

feels is his due and further whether the power sharing arrangement to evolve will offer him security from subsequent loss of political power.

We should keep in mind, in this respect, that there is a marked and inherent difference in orientation between the Cambodians, on both sides, and ourselves and other world spectators. We and other countries like us tend to see Cambodia as one of several of world flash point dangers to peace and we seek to press for settlement because of this. The participants do not see that dampening things down is what it is all about. Nor do they see peace as the overriding imperative.

With respect to the internal political scene in Phnom Penh, Lon Nol continues to face steady but still manageable political opposition within and without his ruling Socio-Republican Party. Central in this political equation, for our purposes, is the personal future of Lon Nol. Prince Sihanouk's latest pronouncement on the subject of negotiations (and he is notoriously erratic in public comment) states he is willing to negotiate with virtually anyone in Phnom Penh except Lon Nol (and presumably his brother, Lon Non). It has been suggested that the price Phnom Penh must pay to begin negotiations is Lon Nol's resignation. Whether this would be acceptable would turn on the degree to which his departure would

weaken the government.

Still another possible political development which always must be borne in mind is a coup d'etat, either by the generals acting collectively or by some unknown from out of the ranks (as Captain Kong Le in Laos)

4. Battlefield Situation. The military scene -- an obvious factor in any proposed negotiations -- at this writing is a kind of ragged stand-off, one in which neither side can prevail nor destroy the other. Pessimism for the short run is not as rife as it was earlier. This must be counted as a plus in terms of negotiated settlement. However projection of the military scene, particularly by Pentagon analysts, is that the Cambodian army next year will go down hill, and rather steeply. It is very nearly conventional wisdom among these people that Cambodia stands on the brink of catastrophe.

5. Other factors:

\* American economic assistance. Present level of aid, if continued, generally is believed sufficient for survival of the Lon Nol government: \$400 million military, \$100 million economic. It is the Administration's judgement that the absolute minimum for Cambodian economic aid is \$100 million of which nearly 30% are shipping costs. At this writing the eventual amount to be allocated



for Cambodia is uncertain. It is obvious that America is in a make or break position as far as the Lon Nol government is concerned.

\* Domestic U.S. considerations intrude to a higher degree than usual in regard to an American approach to negotiated settlement. There would be more grand-stand quarterbacking. There would be greater uncertainty that the U.S. could approach negotiations with high credibility, in terms both of carrot and stick. At the least this would be delimiting: the U.S. could not be the front runner in the effort.

\* Developments in South Vietnam could be a factor. A return to big unit war by the North Vietnamese could upset the current strategic balance in Indochina. Another dimension of this is Cambodian dependency on Saigon and ARVN's willingness to aid FANK in the event of approaching disaster and its obverse, the GVN view of a coalition government in Phnom Penh.

\* The French connection is a factor, one which turns on French influence in the two Cambodian camps, influence which may be less than it appears to be.

\* The Thai connection, Bangkok's view of fundamental political change on the other side of the long Thai-Khmer border.

## III

It is axiomatic that the greater the U.S. involvement in seeking a negotiated settlement in Cambodia the greater the pay-off if successful, the greater the embarrassment if a failure.

For several years various proponents have urged that an international conference, perhaps in Geneva, be staged to end the war in Cambodia, one to which all parties with some direct interest would be invited. A Geneva Conference on Cambodia automatically would be the most complex arrangement possible, far more so than other ideas. It would generate a dynamic of its own, between the two sides but also within the communist camp which could change, perhaps sharply, its network of internationalships. A highly touted international conference would maximize the importance of the effort, raise the stakes of stakes of the game and make success more imperative for the United States than would be some alternate.

## IV

We must beware of those who claim they can see certain catastrophe awaiting in the wings in Cambodia. The record of the Cambodian military observer and prognosticator in the past several years is not an impressive one. Admittedly the battlefield scene, being akin to a roller-coaster ride--is most difficult to chart. But the

fact remains: the frequent dire predictions of catastrophe -- for example, the near unanimous prediction in early August 1973 that Phnom Penh would fall within weeks -- have not been proven. Some who prophesy catastrophe do so for tactical or bureaucratic reasons and should represent no problem to us; only those who genuinely believe themselves are of concern (As Samuel Butler once said: I don't mind lying, but I hate inaccuracy). Yet it is most easy to succumb to the lure of the doomsayer, for it means going with the smart money, eschewing credulity; it taps some hidden nihilistic vein of world's ruin which runs in all of us.

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