1 Vietnam–Cambodia–China Relations (1950s–1975)

I

In the attempt to produce a satisfactory account of the origins of the Third Indochina War, there is no need to go as far back as premodern Cambodian history to describe the already well-documented 'age-old resentments and suspicions'[1] that the Cambodians generally hold against the Vietnamese (and indeed, towards the Thais as well). Our narrative proper therefore begins during the period when many of the main protagonists in the Third Indochina War were already active in the arena of conflict. Over the years, many have passed on, such as Sihanouk, who at the time of the 1954 Geneva Conference was thirty-two years old. Sihanouk, widely regarded as the 'Father of (Cambodia's) independence',[2] died in 2012; and Pol Pot (aka Saloth Sar), who was the general secretary of the Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK) from 1963 to 1981 and the prime minister of Democratic Kampuchea until the Vietnamese invasion in 1978, died in 1998. Others are still alive, such as Hun Sen, who was once a member of the CPK and who at twenty-seven years old was the foreign minister in the then Vietnamese-installed government of the PRK established in January 1979. He was the prime minister of Cambodia, a position he held from 1993 to 2023 (the first four years as the second prime minister). Sihanouk, Pol Pot, and Hun Sen, three of the most prominent actors during the period under study, were all wary of the Vietnamese in their own ways.

Despite the history of resentments and suspicions, both Cambodia's and Vietnam's struggles for independence were intricately connected.

[1] Phrase borrowed from Odd Arne Westad and Sophie Quinn-Judge (ed.), *The Third Indochina War: Conflict between China, Vietnam and Cambodia, 1972–79* (London: Routledge, 2006).

[2] Roger M. Smith, 'Prince Norodom Sihanouk of Cambodia', *Asian Survey*, Volume 7, Number 6, June 1967, p. 353.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. IP address: 18.118.193.82, on 31 Dec 2024 at 23:49:12, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009560078.002

According to a French report of November 1947, the Khmer Issarak and Viet Minh had agreed on a plan to collaborate to fight against the French – Vietnamese and Khmer units could either choose an Issarak or a Viet Minh commander. The Viet Minh would send instructors to train Khmer Issarak. Both sides could also operate in each other's territory according to agreed limits.[3] In Cambodia, in April 1950, the inaugural Congress of the Khmer Resistance was convened under the leadership of Son Ngoc Minh (Achar Mean). Other key personalities included Tou Samouth and Sieu Heng, all close to the Vietnamese communists. The United Issarak Front was established initially with only forty ethnic Cambodian members from the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP), although hundreds were being trained in communist political schools set up by the Vietnamese.[4] As Shawn McHale noted, despite the collaboration, 'Vietnamese–Khmer relations from 1945 to 1954 were marked by distrust and even violence … the norm was a fragile coexistence'.[5] According to McHale, 'as the super space of French Indochina crumbled, Cambodia and Vietnam were refashioned by dominant ethnic elites into new, ethnically defined nation-states'. The 'extensive ethnic violence' (rarely mentioned in the secondary literature) 'followed by France's 1949 award of Cochinchina to the new state of Vietnam, reshaped Khmer–Vietnamese relations and contributed to Khmer Rouge antipathy to the Vietnamese'. In his analysis, the Khmer Rouge attacks on Vietnam from 1975, and their desire to reclaim the Mekong Delta and 'to purge Cambodia proper of Vietnamese', were a continuation of the earlier conflicts.[6]

In May 1951, the Second Congress of the ICP (Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos) decided to split the clandestine party into three separate parties, but Vietnam would continue to direct the overall resistance struggle. Following that decision, the Kampuchean (Khmer) People's

[3] For details, see Shawn McHale, 'Ethnicity, Violence, and Khmer-Vietnamese Relations: The Significance of the Lower Mekong Delta, 1757–1954', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Volume 72, Number 2, May 2013, pp. 367–390.

[4] David P. Chandler, *A History of Cambodia* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992), p. 181.

[5] Shawn McHale, 'Ethnicity, Violence, and Khmer–Vietnamese Relations: The Significance of the Lower Mekong Delta, 1757–1954', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Volume 72, Number 2, May 2013, p. 373.

[6] Shawn McHale, 'Ethnicity, Violence, and Khmer–Vietnamese Relations: The Significance of the Lower Mekong Delta, 1757–1954', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Volume 72, Number 2, May 2013, pp. 385–386.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. IP address: 18.118.193.82, on 31 Dec 2024 at 23:49:12, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009560078.002

Revolutionary Party (KPRP) was established in June 1951.[7] Like McHale, David Chandler also noted that 'the interplay between nationalism and internationalism inside the Cambodian Communist movement … has plagued the party since the early 1950s'.[8] It is worth noting that the KPRP is recognised as the precursor of the CPP, the party which is currently ruling Cambodia under Hun Sen. The KPRP was also the precursor of the CPK led by Pol Pot, which was dissolved in 1981, a consequence of the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia in December 1978. More of this later. French intelligence reported in 1953 that the KPRP had recruited and trained many guerrilla fighters, particularly in eastern Cambodia bordering Vietnam. Mostly trained by the Vietnamese, many of the anti-colonial Cambodian guerrilla forces were also 'led and staffed by Vietnamese'. As a political force, the KPRP, however, could not compete with Sihanouk, who in 1952 led a 'royal crusade' and towards the end of 1953 succeeded in arm-twisting the French to grant Cambodia independence.[9]

The 1954 Geneva Conference is one of the most important turning points in the Cold War in Southeast Asia. Much has been written about the conference which, in the words of Chen Jian and Shen Zhihua, 'ended the First Indochina War, while at the same time, prepared conditions for the unfolding of the process leading to the Second Indochina War'.[10] What concerns us here is it how the decisions reached at Geneva in 1954 affected Cambodia. The Geneva Agreements 'drastically changed relations between the Khmer and Vietnamese communists'.[11] Wilfred Burchett rightly noted that 'when historians put their fingers on the major impediment to the Cambodian revolution, they must point to the consequences of the 1954 Geneva Conference on Indochina'.[12]

[7] See Takashi Shiraishi and Motoo Furuta (eds), *Indochina in the 1940s and 1950s* (Ithaca, NY: SEAP, Cornell University, 1992), chapter 5.
[8] David P. Chandler, *A History of Cambodia* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992), p. 182; Martin Stuart-Fox, *A History of Laos* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 80–81.
[9] David Chandler, *Facing the Cambodian Past: Selected Essays 1971–1994* (St Leonards, Australia: Allen & Unwin, 1996), p. 219.
[10] 'The Geneva Conference of 1954', *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, Number 16, Fall 2007/Winter 2008, p. 7.
[11] Dmitry Mosyakov, 'The Khmer Rouge and the Vietnamese Communists: A History of Their Relations as Told in the Soviet Archives', https://gsp.yale.edu/node/297.
[12] Wilfred Burchett, *The China Cambodia Vietnam Triangle* (Chicago: Vanguard Books, 1981), p. 27.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. IP address: 18.118.193.82, on 31 Dec 2024 at 23:49:12, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009560078.002

The conference affirmed the independence of Cambodia and Sihanouk as the leader. The Vietnamese communists led by Pham Van Dong at the conference were unable to persuade the others that the KPRP should to be represented. The Khmer Issarak were not even given any territory in Cambodia to regroup (like the Pathet Lao in Laos). Without any sanctuary in Cambodia, a few thousand Khmer Issarak retreated into North Vietnam. Many were imprisoned or killed by the Sihanouk regime.[13]

Pham Van Dong did what he could but the Vietnamese communists themselves were weak and Hanoi was dependent on Chinese and Soviet support, which on this issue was not forthcoming. Moscow, represented by Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov, did not support the representation of both the Khmer Issarak and Pathet Lao at Geneva. Beijing, represented by Foreign Minister Zhou Enlai, was prepared to recognise the legitimacy of the Sihanouk-led government if Sihanouk did not allow any American bases to be established in his country. Sihanouk himself believed that neutrality was the best policy for Cambodia, which pleased the Chinese (and eventually the North Vietnamese communists as well). Indeed, until his ouster on 18 March 1970 by Lon Nol, who steered Cambodia towards the US, Sihanouk increasingly demonstrated his 'genuine independence of the West' and his 'friendship towards China'.[14]

The Geneva Agreements further required the Vietnamese communists to withdraw their forces from Cambodia. The last Khmer-Vietminh units left Cambodia in October 1954.[15] In December 1955, Le Duan, who was then based in South Vietnam, put forward a fourteen-point action plan that called for a more aggressive and militant approach to complement the political struggle in the South, which was rejected by the Hanoi leadership. The Hanoi leadership assessed that they were not ready to accelerate the military struggle in the South. Beijing and Moscow were also not in favour of any action that could lead to a

[13] Ben Kiernan, 'Wild Chickens, Farm Chickens, and Cormorants: Kampuchea's Eastern Zone under Pol Pot', in David P. Chandler and Ben Kiernan (eds), *Revolution and Its Aftermath in Kampuchea: Eight Essays* (New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, Monograph Series No. 25, 1983), pp. 153–154.

[14] R. B. Smith, *An International History of the Vietnam War, Volume 1: Revolution and Containment 1955–1961* (London: Macmillan, 1983), p. 117.

[15] Philip Short, *Pol Pot: Anatomy of a Nightmare* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2004), p. 104.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. IP address: 18.118.193.82, on 31 Dec 2024 at 23:49:12, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009560078.002

new military confrontation. Had Le Duan's proposal (which had been endorsed by the Nam Bo Regional Committee) been accepted, there would have been a step up in Vietnamese support of activities there, as recommended in the fourteen-point proposal, as Cambodia was deemed to be of strategic importance to the Vietnamese communist reunification plan. According to the US State Department, while there had been numerous reports since 1956 of Vietnamese communist cells in Cambodia, there was no indication of any serious intensification of communist activities there.[16] Hanoi's policy up to the point when the Khmer Rouge took control of Cambodia on 17 April 1975 (ahead of the Vietnamese communist reunification of North and South Vietnam on 30 April 1975) was consistently to prioritise its own independence struggle before that of Cambodia, and that they would assist the Khmer Rouge after reunification. Hanoi chose Sihanouk, who had real power over the Cambodian communists, believing that the latter were too small to be effective, and wanted 'all Cambodian dissidents to pursue a united front route (managed covertly by the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) which would include Cambodians) and make primary use of ethnic Vietnamese living in Cambodia'.[17] The years after Geneva were 'the nadir of the Cambodian communist movement'.[18] Cambodia 'lived in the shadow of the Vietnam War'.[19]

II

This is where we introduce Pol Pot. Saloth Sar (his name before the change to 'Pol Pot' in 1976) was 25 (or 26) years of age at the time of the Geneva Conference. He had returned to Cambodia from Paris in 1953.

[16] Memorandum from the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Rice) to the Deputy Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs (Johnson), 10 April 1963, *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS), Southeast Asia, 1961–1963, Volume 23*, pp. 231–233.

[17] *Vietnam–Cambodia Conflict, Report Prepared at the Request of the Subcommittee of Asian and Pacific Affairs Committee of International Relations by the Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1978), p. 5.

[18] Anne Ruth Hansen and Judy Ledgerwood (eds), *At the Edge of the Forest: Essays on Cambodia, History and Narrative in Honor of David Chandler* (Ithaca, NY: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 2008), p. 11.

[19] Qiang Zhai, 'China and the Cambodian Conflict, 1970–1975', *Searching for the Truth*, Second Quarterly Issue, Special English Edition, July 2003, p. 15.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. IP address: 18.118.193.82, on 31 Dec 2024 at 23:49:12, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009560078.002

Back in Cambodia, he was inducted into the ICP and mentored by Tou Samouth, one of the two founding members of the KPRP, eventually establishing himself as Tou's secretary and principal aide. During this period, Saloth Sar also became friends with several other fellow travellers, notably Ieng Sary, Khieu Ponnary (whom he subsequently married), Sok Thuok (Vorn Vet), and Nuon Chea. Sar was able to witness the heavy-handedness of the Vietnamese, their control of the KPRP, and their 'constant use of Cambodians to carry out menial tasks'.[20] As David Chandler noted, the KPRP had to be 'reconstituted in the context of Hanoi's informal alliance with Sihanouk', which meant that the KPRP 'was to be brought back to life, encouraged to expand, but kept silent and forbidden to engage in armed struggle'.[21] The Khmer Rouge had two choices, in the words of Chandler, 'between guidance from Vietnam on the one hand and independence, confrontation, and the possibility of obliteration on the other'.[22]

One group of Khmer Rouge, notably associated with Tou Samouth, was inclined to cooperate with the Vietnamese, whereas another, notably Pol Pot, leaned towards decoupling from the Vietnamese. Those closely associated with Pol Pot (some have coined the term the 'Paris wing' for this group) apparently had a visceral hatred for the Vietnamese. One of the most 'pronounced features' of Polpotism was its 'anti-Vietnamese character'.[23] For example, Pol Pot's view of the 1954 Geneva Conference was that it was 'a deliberate Vietnamese "sell-out" of Kampuchea',[24] when, as briefly described earlier, it was much more complicated. The Vietnamese communists at Geneva also did not achieve what they wanted.

Stephen Heder's fieldwork research, however, showed that it is a 'myth that there was an "internationalist" or "pro-Vietnamese" stream within the Cambodian communist movement … it was not

[20] Philip Short, *Pol Pot: Anatomy of a Nightmare* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2004), pp. 96–97, 100.

[21] David P. Chandler, *Brother Number One: A Political Biography of Pol Pot* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992), p. 61.

[22] David P. Chandler, *Brother Number One: A Political Biography of Pol Pot* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992), p. 61.

[23] See Matthew Galway, *The Emergence of Global Maoism: China's Red Evangelism and the Cambodian Communist Movement* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2022), pp. 184–187, p. 184.

[24] Wilfred Burchett, *The China Cambodia Vietnam Triangle* (Chicago: Vanguard Books, 1981), p. 72.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. IP address: 18.118.193.82, on 31 Dec 2024 at 23:49:12, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009560078.002

about whether to oppose Vietnamese hegemony over Cambodia, but about how to do so'.[25] Indeed, until mid-1978, those who disagreed with Pol Pot's policies 'remained deeply committed to opposing any Vietnamese invasion or attempt to assert political influence over Cambodia'. In the latter half of 1978, those who disagreed with Pol Pot 'remained divided among themselves over how much Vietnamese help should be accepted in the fight against Pol Pot and on what terms'. Heder concluded that, 'despite whatever political debts' Pol Pot's opponents 'may feel the Cambodian people and they themselves genuinely owe the Vietnamese, historical anti-Vietnamese sentiments remain not that far from the surface'.[26] To Pol Pot and his group, Hanoi was a 'regional representative of hegemonic, bureaucratic communism'.[27] The Vietnamese in turn looked upon the Khmer Rouge as 'Maoist primitives'.[28]

The Khmer Rouge perspective of Vietnam as having always wanted to annex and swallow Cambodia, as well as exterminate the Cambodian race, is another example of Pol Pot's extreme views. As the *Black Book* (issued by the Khmer Rouge in September 1978) pointed out, one of the means by which the Vietnamese hoped to achieve their goal was through the strategy of an 'Indochina Federation'.[29] There were two schools of opinion within the Vietnamese communist movement on the issue of its relations with Cambodia and Laos. One was for a unified Indochina communist party with Vietnam assuming the role of a 'big brother'. The other advocated a looser form of unity between the three Indochinese countries whereby assistance could be given to one another as and when the need arose. This was the arrangement that the Chinese favoured, whereas Le Duan and his closest associates were for a unified communist movement led by Vietnam. In the minds

[25] Stephen Heder, 'Reflections on Cambodian Political History: Backgrounder to Recent Developments', Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Canberra, Working Paper No. 239, September 1991, p. 12.
[26] Stephen Heder, 'Reflections on Cambodian Political History: Backgrounder to Recent Developments', Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Canberra, Working Paper No. 239, September 1991, p. 12.
[27] William S. Turley and Jeffrey Race, 'The Third Indochina War', *Foreign Policy*, Number 38, Spring 1980, p. 96.
[28] William S. Turley and Jeffrey Race, 'The Third Indochina War', *Foreign Policy*, Number 38, Spring 1980, p. 96.
[29] This is the theme of the *Livre Noir/Black Book*. Also see 'KR Intelligence on Cambodia: Edited Excerpts…', *Phnom Penh Post*, 22 May–4 June 1998, p. 5.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. IP address: 18.118.193.82, on 31 Dec 2024 at 23:49:12, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009560078.002

of Le Duan and those close to him, it was the Chinese who had forced them to accede to the French demand that the problems of Cambodia and Laos be separated from that of Vietnam in 1954.[30]

Most Vietnam specialists have concluded that the idea of an Indochina Federation was abandoned in the late 1930s. There is no doubt that in its behaviour, Vietnam continued to display a neocolonialist attitude towards Cambodia (and Laos).[31] This would explain the Cambodian perception of Vietnam as well as the view of ASEAN that Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia in 1978 was part of Hanoi's plan to re-establish the Indochina Federation. It is perhaps worth considering David Elliot's remark that

> to say that many of the major episodes in the complex chain of causality that led to Vietnam's invasion of Kampuchea originated outside Vietnam's borders does not necessarily exculpate Hanoi from responsibility for its actions. But to accept the common view of Vietnam as an expansionist garrison state is to misread the motives underlying its actions – whatever the consequences of those actions may have been.[32]

We return to this in Chapter 2.

At the 2nd Party Congress of the KPRP at the end of September 1960, convened under orders from Hanoi, there were disagreements between Saloth Sar and his group, who championed a more militant struggle against imperialism and Sihanouk on the one hand, and the senior leaders of the party (led by Tou Samouth), who continued to advocate political struggle within the framework of Sihanouk's regime (as advocated by the Vietnamese) on the other.[33] The latter view prevailed despite Sihanouk's repressive actions against the left. These measures led thousands of Khmer Issarak forces to retreat

[30] See *Vietnamese Foreign Ministry White Book on Relations with China*, BBC/SWB/FE/6238/6 October 1979, and BBC/SWB/FE/6242/11 October 1979.

[31] For a Soviet perspective, see Dmitry Mosyakov, *The Khmer Rouge and the Vietnamese Communists: A History of Their Relations as Told in the Soviet Archives*, https://gsp.yale.edu/sites/default/files/gs15_-_the_khmer_rouge_and_the_vietnamese_communists_a_history_of_their_relations_as_told_in_the_soviet_archives.pdf, p. 56.

[32] David W. P. Elliott, 'Vietnam in Asia: Strategy and Diplomacy in a New Context', *International Journal*, Volume 38, Number 2, Spring 1983, p. 290.

[33] See Ben Kiernan, *How Pol Pot Came to Power* (London: Version, 1985), pp. 189–193, 367; David P. Chandler, *The Tragedy of Cambodian History: Politics, War and Revolution since 1945* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), pp. 112–115, 205, n. 33.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. IP address: 18.118.193.82, on 31 Dec 2024 at 23:49:12, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009560078.002

into North Vietnam, where they remained to await Hanoi's consent to resume armed struggle. This group became known as the pro-Hanoi faction of the Khmer Rouge. Opposing this group was Saloth Sar, who, as we have noted, opposed Vietnamese domination of their movement. On 20 July or thereabouts, Tou Samouth died under questionable circumstances (which we do not need to go into here). As a result, Saloth Sar became the acting secretary-general of the party and was subsequently confirmed as secretary-general at the 3rd Congress of the KPRP on 20–21 February 1963. In the words of Ralph Smith: 'Therein lay the origins of the bitter conflict which emerged twenty years later for control of Democratic Kampuchea.'[34]

The presence of two Khmer Rouge factions – one 'friendly' and the other 'hostile' towards the Vietnamese – also explains the subsequent disagreement over the date of the formation of the KPRP. The current CPP, led by Hun Sen, traces its origins to the 1st Party Congress held in June 1951. It acknowledges the 2nd Congress in 1960 (mentioned earlier) and the 3rd Congress in 1979, rejecting the 1963 (when Pol Pot was confirmed as secretary-general), 1975, and 1978 congresses convened by Pol Pot. The CPK led by Pol Pot, on the other hand, traces its origins to 30 September 1960 (the 2nd Party Congress) when he was elected to the Central Committee of the KPRP while disclaiming the legitimacy of the 1951 Congress as it was deemed to be directed by the Vietnamese.[35]

We now know that after becoming secretary-general of the KPRP, in 1965 and 1966, Saloth Sar made trips to North Vietnam and China for consultations. The visits also gave the Vietnamese as well as the Chinese an opportunity to get to know Tou Samouth's successor.

[34] R. B. Smith, *An International History of the Vietnam War, Volume 1: Revolution and Containment 1955–1961* (London: Macmillan, 1983), p. 82.

[35] See K. Viviane Frings, 'Rewriting Cambodian History to "Adapt" It to a New Political Context: The Kampuchean People's Revolutionary Party's Historiography (1979–1991)', *Modern Asian Studies*, Volume 31, Number 4, 1997, pp. 807–846; David P. Chandler, 'Revising the Past in Democratic Kampuchea: When Was the Birthday of the Party?', *Pacific Affairs*, Volume 56, Number 2, Summer 1983, pp. 288–300; R. B. Smith, *An International History of the Vietnam War, Volume 1: Revolution and Containment 1955–1961* (London: Macmillan, 1983), pp. 235–238; Ben Kiernan and Chanthou Boua (eds), *Peasants and Politics in Kampuchea 1952–1981* (London: Zed Press, 1982), pp. 252–253.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. IP address: 18.118.193.82, on 31 Dec 2024 at 23:49:12, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009560078.002

To his chagrin, the Vietnamese rejected his proposal for an 'armed struggle against Sihanouk and a freestanding Cambodian revolution'.[36] We do not fully know what transpired in China but apparently Sar received better treatment there, or at least he felt the Chinese were more understanding and supportive of him, although Sihanouk's 'regular anti-American, pro-Chinese stance probably meant that the Khmer Rouge got only nominal attention from Beijing at the time'.[37] As Philip Short noted: 'Rhetoric aside, the Chinese were, at heart, no more anxious than Vietnam to see armed struggle develop in Cambodia – and for exactly the same reasons: Sihanouk's cooperation was vital to the pursuance of the war in the South.'[38] Nevertheless, the visit to China, at least from Sar's perspective, marked the 'start of a *de facto* alliance' – 'If we want to keep our distance from Vietnam, we will have to rely on China', said Saloth Sar after the visit.[39] What could have led Sar to this conclusion was his meeting with Kang Sheng (who was in charge of the Chinese Communist Party relations with the international communist fraternity), who took a liking to Sar and adopted him as a protégé and promoted him as the 'true voice of the Cambodian revolution'. We do not have enough information of Kang Sheng's meddling into what was considered the Foreign Ministry's turf, except that Deng Yingchao reportedly told a visiting Thai delegation in the early 1980s that it was Kang Sheng who was responsible for Beijing's support of Pol Pot. Kang Sheng was a staunch supporter of the Cultural Revolution and the Gang of Four who opposed the pragmatic approach of Zhou Enlai and the Chinese Foreign Ministry. Kang Sheng died in December 1975. In contrast, Pol Pot did not have any ties with Moscow.[40] In 1969, Le Duan, at the behest of the Soviet

[36] Anne Ruth Hansen and Judy Ledgerwood (eds), *At the Edge of the Forest: Essays on Cambodia, History and Narrative in Honor of David Chandler* (Ithaca, NY: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 2008), pp. 12–13.

[37] Sophie Richardson, *China, Cambodia, and the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), p. 54.

[38] Philip Short, *Pol Pot: Anatomy of a Nightmare* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2004), p. 160. See also, Sophie Richardson, *China, Cambodia, and the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), pp. 52–55; Ben Kiernan and Chanthou Boua (eds), *Peasants and Politics in Kampuchea 1952–1981* (London: Zed Press, 1982), pp. 254–255.

[39] Quoted in Philip Short, *Pol Pot: Anatomy of a Nightmare* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2004), p. 161.

[40] John Byron and Robert Pack, *The Claws of the Dragon* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), pp. 356–357.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. IP address: 18.118.193.82, on 31 Dec 2024 at 23:49:12, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009560078.002

ambassador in Hanoi, tried unsuccessfully to persuade him to establish relations with the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.[41]

From the report of a 29 June 1968 conversation between Zhou Enlai and Pham Hung (who headed the Central Office for South Vietnam (COSVN)), we learned that Beijing was concerned about the problematic relationship of the Vietnamese communists and Khmer Rouge. He advised the Vietnamese to work on improving the relationship and to help the Khmer Rouge 'understand the overall context and be aware of the greater task of defeating the US … In short, make them understand the international approach and understand that one cannot fight many enemies at the same time.' Zhou revealed that he had instructed Chinese embassy staff in Phnom Penh not to fraternise with the Khmer Rouge because 'the problem will be too complicated'. According to Zhou, 'the Cambodian comrades wish to develop armed struggle. Sihanouk will oppress them, and you (the Vietnamese) can no longer go through Cambodia. And if Sihanouk oppresses the Cambodian communists, China can no longer provide Cambodia will weapons.'[42] Beijing was, however, aware that Sihanouk, in Zhou Enlai's words, was 'double dealing' and in 1969 veering towards the right.[43]

Despite the US bombing of eastern Cambodia (with Sihanouk's acquiescence) and the restoration of US–Cambodia diplomatic relations on 11 June 1969, Hanoi still refused to countenance an armed struggle in Cambodia. Sihanouk shrewdly balanced his reconciliation with the US by recognising the Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam established on 8 June 1969 by the Hanoi-directed National Liberation Front. The Hanoi leadership maintained that Sihanouk was a valuable pawn against the US and rejected the idea

[41] See *Black Paper: Facts and Evidences of the Acts of Aggression and Annexation of Vietnam against Kampuchea* (Department of Press and Information of the Ministry of Democratic Kampuchea, September 1978), or *Black Paper* for short, p. 33.

[42] Zhou Enlai and Pham Hung, Beijing, 19 June 1968, in Odd Arne Westad et al. (eds) *77 Conversations between Chinese and Foreign Leaders of the Wars in IndoChina, 1964–1977*, Working Paper Number 22, Cold War International History Project, May 1998, Washington, DC.

[43] Zhou Enlai, Kang Sheng, Pham Van Dong, Hoang Van Thai, Pham Hung, and Others in the COSVN Delegation, Beijing, 20 and 21 April 1969, in Odd Arne Westad et al. (eds) *77 Conversations between Chinese and Foreign Leaders of the Wars in IndoChina, 1964–1977*, Working Paper Number 22, Cold War International History Project, May 1998, Washington, DC.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. IP address: 18.118.193.82, on 31 Dec 2024 at 23:49:12, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009560078.002

of overthrowing him. Relations between the Khmer Rouge and its Vietnamese counterpart, which had not been smooth under Pol Pot's tenure, worsened drastically in 1969. As the *Black Paper* put it, 'Friendship' and 'Solidarity' were only empty words. Relations remained tense till 18 March 1970 when Sihanouk was ousted.[44]

III

The ouster of Sihanouk by Lon Nol on 18 March 1970 is the seminal event in Cold War Cambodian history. As described earlier, Sihanouk was the reason why both the Vietnamese and Chinese restrained the Khmer Rouge from launching an armed struggle of their own. The ouster of Sihanouk altered the game plan. The ouster of Sihanouk by the pro-American and anti-Vietnamese Lon Nol adversely affected the ability of the Vietnamese communist to conduct the war.[45] Pol Pot by coincidence was in Beijing (after his unpleasant trip to Hanoi) when the coup took place. As Steve Heder noted, after telling Saloth Sar and Nuon Chea for more than two years that their policies were incorrect, their attitude towards the Khmer Rouge militancy changed '180 degrees'.[46] The Cambodian communists were further energised after an initially reluctant Sihanouk was successfully persuaded by the Chinese to establish a united front with the Khmer Rouge on 23 March 1970 – the Royal Government of the National Union of Kampuchea (GRUNK) was the government-in-exile based in Beijing. Immediately, the Khmer Rouge received the international recognition it failed to get during the 1954 Geneva Conference. Riding on the immense popularity of the deposed Sihanouk, the Khmer Rouge ranks increased exponentially although not everyone who joined necessarily shared Pol Pot's views and vision.

It was never going to be an easy relationship. But as Sophie Richardson noted, 'Sihanouk feared the KR's [Khmer Rouge]

[44] *Black Paper: Facts and Evidences of the Acts of Aggression and Annexation of Vietnam against Kampuchea* (Department of Press and Information of the Ministry of Democratic Kampuchea, September 1978), or *Black Paper* for short, pp. 27, 34.

[45] For Hanoi and Beijing's reaction to the coup, see Ang Cheng Guan, *Ending the Vietnam War: The Vietnamese Communists' Perspective* (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 45–48.

[46] Steve Heder, *Cambodian Communism and the Vietnamese Model, Volume 1: Imitation and Independence 1930–1975* (Bangkok: White Lotus Press, 2004), p. 157.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. IP address: 18.118.193.82, on 31 Dec 2024 at 23:49:12, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009560078.002

radicalism and growing military strength; the KR feared his indisputable popularity among Cambodians' but 'without the kind of infrastructure only the KR maintained inside Cambodia, it was unlikely Sihanouk would ever be able to retain control of the country; without Sihanouk's international profile, it would be difficult for the KR to garner much assistance'.[47] Zhou Enlai did what he could to mediate between Pol Pot and Sihanouk even while he was in hospital dying of cancer, but to no avail. According to Nayan Chanda, Zhou was concerned about the future of Cambodia if the Khmer Rouge triumphed over Sihanouk.[48] Within China in the 1970s, there was an intensifying tussle between the radicals (such as Kang Sheng mentioned earlier) and moderates (such as Zhou who had been ill since 1972 and died in January 1976), which the radicals eventually won, albeit briefly.

Another set of difficulties involved Sihanouk/Khmer Rouge–Vietnamese communist relations. We now know that in the immediate aftermath of the March coup, Beijing as well as Hanoi briefly tried to strike a deal with Lon Nol. When that failed, both the Chinese and the Vietnamese threw their full support behind Sihanouk. Beijing sponsored the Indochinese Summit Conference (24–25 April), which brought together Sihanouk, Pham Van Dong, Nguyen Huu Tho, and Souphanouvong (of Laos) in Guangzhou. On 30 April 1970, Hanoi informed COSVN that 'Indochina has become a single battlefield'[49] – 'ironically because the VWP [Vietnamese Workers' Party] suddenly gave the Cambodians literally overwhelmingly support, that triggered Cambodian fears of VWP hopes to revive the old ICP project of a militarily and politically unified Indochina'.[50]

According to Chinese sources, Zhou Enlai made a special trip to Guangzhou to help reconcile the differences between Sihanouk

[47] Sophie Richardson, *China, Cambodia, and the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), pp. 68, 76.

[48] Cited in Sophie Richardson, *China, Cambodia, and the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), pp. 77–78.

[49] For details of the military developments in Cambodia, see Ang Cheng Guan, *Ending the Vietnamese War: The Vietnamese Communists' Perspective* (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 50–53.

[50] Steve Heder, *Cambodian Communism and the Vietnamese Model, Volume 1: Imitation and Independence 1930–1975* (Bangkok: White Lotus Press, 2004), p. 159.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. IP address: 18.118.193.82, on 31 Dec 2024 at 23:49:12, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009560078.002

and Pham Van Dong to produce a joint declaration at the end of the conference.[51] Sihanouk was very concerned about letting the Vietnamese communists operate unfettered in Cambodia and had to be assured that Hanoi would respect Cambodia's territorial integrity. According to the *Black Paper*, Pol Pot too was uncomfortable with the large influx of Vietnamese troops as well as Cambodians who had been living in northern Vietnam since the 1950s entering or returning into Cambodia. The Vietnamese apparently continuously pressured the Khmer Rouge to accept the idea of mixed commands of Vietnamese cadres operating in Cambodian villages, communes, and districts. Pol Pot objected to the Vietnamese-proposed Joint Resistance Command headquarters, and in a November 1970 meeting the Vietnamese allegedly attempted to assassinate him and those who opposed the idea.

The relationship between the two sides further deteriorated in 1971.[52] Vietnamese accounts acknowledged that their differences and problems with the Khmer Rouge were obvious for all to see even though 'the Pol Pot-Ieng Sary clique' were reliant on the Vietnamese communists, and thus did not openly oppose them. But as the differences grew more acute, the Khmer Rouge allegedly confiscated Vietnamese ammunition and kidnapped and even killed Vietnamese cadres.[53] Indeed, at a July 1971 meeting, the Khmer Rouge leadership decided to break with the Vietnamese communists and went as far as declaring them the principal enemy of the Cambodian revolution. A purge of Cambodians seen or perceived to be pro-Hanoi was carried out and such purges intensified in 1972. According to Tran Van Tra, because the top priority was the war against the Americans, the Hanoi leadership tried to downplay their problems with the Khmer Rouge.[54]

[51] See Qiang Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950–1975* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), pp. 190–191, n. 66.

[52] *Black Paper: Facts and Evidences of the Acts of Aggression and Annexation of Vietnam against Kampuchea* (Department of Press and Information of the Ministry of Democratic Kampuchea, September 1978), pp. 58–59.

[53] *Lich Su Quan Doi Nhan Dan, Tap II* (Hanoi: Nha Xuat Ban Quan Doi Nhan Dan, 1988), p. 385.

[54] Thomas Engelbert and Christopher E. Goscha, *Falling out of Touch: A Study on Vietnamese Communist Policy towards an Emerging Cambodian Communist Movement, 1930–1975* (Victoria: Monash Asia Institute, 1995), pp. 99–100, nn. 162–166.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. IP address: 18.118.193.82, on 31 Dec 2024 at 23:49:12, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009560078.002

Military cooperation between the Vietnamese communists and Khmer Rouge ended in mid-1972 or thereabouts, around the time Hanoi was seriously trying to reach a settlement with the US. One of the issues being negotiated between Henry Kissinger and Le Duc Tho at their secret Paris talks was the presence of Vietnamese communist forces in Cambodia (and Laos). Pol Pot refused to have anything to do with the ongoing North Vietnam–US negotiations in Paris and Hanoi was unable to persuade him to cooperate. At a 26 January 1973 meeting, Le Duan informed Ieng Sary of Hanoi's decision to sign the Paris Peace Agreement (which was signed on 27 January 1973) and told him that the Khmer Rouge should coordinate with the Vietnamese. Pol Pot rejected the idea outright. With the signing of the Paris Peace Agreement, Cambodia would not receive any more assistance from the Vietnamese communists. Pham Van Dong and Vo Nguyen Giap advised Sihanouk 'not to throw oil on the fire of the war which was about to be extinct in Indochina'.[55]

Tran Van Tra recalled, in an interview with Thomas Engelbert in 1989, that when the Vietnamese communists withdrew from Cambodia, the Khmer Rouge took the opportunity to attack them. The attacks increased as more Vietnamese communist forces were withdrawn. This occurred all over Cambodia except for the north-eastern part, which Tra described as the 'strategic lifeblood of the southern resistance', where the Vietnamese remained in control.[56] Le Duc Tho, in a March 1980 interview, explained that in the assessment of the Khmer Rouge leadership, 'a ceasefire at that time was not to their advantage', because with the signing of the Paris Agreement 'the US defeat was obvious'. The agreement thus 'paved the way and created favourable conditions, both military and political, for the victory of the Kampuchean revolution'. They therefore wanted 'to fight to the end in order to seize total power in Kampuchea, rather than to have a ceasefire and then to

[55] Julio Jeldres, 'Cambodia Relations with Vietnam: Historical Mistrust and Vulnerability', *Journal of Greater Mekong Studies*, Volume 2, Number 1, February 2020, p. 68.

[56] Thomas Engelbert and Christopher E. Goscha, *Falling Out of Touch: A Study on Vietnamese Communist Party Policy towards an Emerging Cambodian Communist Movement, 1930–1975* (Clayton: Monash Asia Institute, 1995), pp. 101–108; Truong Nhu Tang, *Journal of a VietCong* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1986), pp. 101, 219.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. IP address: 18.118.193.82, on 31 Dec 2024 at 23:49:12, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009560078.002

negotiate a political settlement'.[57] Sihanouk too 'wanted to prolong the fighting'.[58]

It is perhaps worth noting that Zhou Enlai was of the view that Cambodia should not, in his words to Henry Kissinger in February 1973, 'become completely red now' as that would result in 'even greater problems'. Zhou asked Kissinger to persuade Lon Nol to allow Sihanouk to return to Phnom Penh as head of state. Washington, Sophie Richardson noted, did not heed Zhou's strategy until four days before the fall of Phnom Penh on 17 April 1975.[59] Washington's inability or unwillingness to move its client Lon Nol to reach a settlement with Sihanouk was a 'perpetual irritant in Sino-American relations' in 1973–1974.[60] Zhou Enlai was concerned that the fighting in Cambodia made it 'more difficult for Peking to acquiesce in the public manifestation of the rapprochement with Washington, it delays US military disengagement from Indochina, and it most certainly complicated relations with China's Indochina allies'.[61] Beijing, however, had only limited influence over the Khmer Rouge and, as one National Security Council (NSC) paper put it, 'most of their Cambodian eggs remain in the Sihanouk basket'. Sihanouk had been variously described as 'mercurial', 'irrepressible', 'intemperate', and not easy to control or influence. Kissinger had observed that in his conversation with Zhou on Cambodia, the latter at times betrayed a degree of exasperation with Sihanouk. We still do not have the

[57] Anthony Barnett, 'Interview with Le Duc Tho', in Anthony Barnett and John Pilger, *Aftermath: The Struggle of Cambodia and Vietnam*, NS Report 5, 1982, pp. 54–59.

[58] Zhou Enlai and Le Thanh Nghi, Beijing, 8–10 October 1973, in Odd Arne Westad et.al. (ed.), *77 Conversations between Chinese and Foreign Leaders of the Wars in IndoChina, 1964–1977*, Working Paper Number 22, Cold War International History Project, May 1998, Washington, DC.

[59] Sophie Richardson, *China, Cambodia, and the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), p. 78.

[60] Priscilla Roberts (ed.), *Window on the Forbidden City: The Beijing Diaries of David Bruce 1973–1974* (University of Hong Kong, Centre of Asian Studies, 2001), p. 34.

[61] National Security Council (NSC) Memorandum to Henry A. Kissinger on Peking and the Cambodian Issue (Secret/Sensitive/No Foreign Dissem), 26 May 1973. US Ambassador to China, David Bruce, recorded in his diary that Zhou felt 'particular urgency' reaching a solution in Cambodia. See, Priscilla Roberts (ed.), *Window on the Forbidden City: The Beijing Diaries of David Bruce 1973–1974* (University of Hong Kong, Centre of Asian Studies, 2001), p. 72.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. IP address: 18.118.193.82, on 31 Dec 2024 at 23:49:12, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009560078.002

complete information, but evidently Zhou's support for Sihanouk, which was also the Chinese Foreign Ministry's position, was becoming untenable by July 1973. In November 1974, Deng Xiaoping (since rehabilitated), in a conversation with Henry Kissinger, gave the latter a clear impression that the Chinese leadership now preferred a 'red Cambodia' dominated by the Khmer Rouge rather than a return to the regime under Sihanouk. Both the Americans and the Chinese knew that Sihanouk would eventually end up a figurehead in a Khmer Rouge regime.[62]

In summary, while Hanoi and Beijing shared a common concern about the Khmer Rouge insistence on continuing to fight in Cambodia and would like to see the fighting stop, and both saw Sihanouk playing a role in post-war Cambodia, Hanoi wanted to see the victory of GRUNK led by Sihanouk over the US-backed Lon Nol regime, with the caveat that the Khmer Rouge (like the Pathet Lao) would be a junior partner of the Vietnamese communists and that the Khmer Rouge would have control over Sihanouk. Beijing, when Zhou Enlai was still in control of foreign policy, on the other hand, envisioned Sihanouk playing a leading role and not just acting as a figurehead in a post-war Cambodia. But as noted earlier, the Chinese position changed. Sihanouk would still have a role, only it would not be a leading one.

Sihanouk confided to Etienne Manac'h (French ambassador to China) in May 1973 that his relations with Hanoi was still 'superficially cordial' but 'in fact had become seriously strained and would most likely deteriorate further' as he believed that 'Hanoi had designs on Cambodia'.[63] According to Sihanouk, the Chinese had assured him that Hanoi would not be allowed to 'satellitise' Cambodia.[64] Beijing further wanted the US to continue to play a diplomatic role in Cambodia after the Vietnam War ended because they feared that

[62] See Wang Chenyi, 'The Chinese Communist Party's Relationship with the Khmer Rouge in the 1970s: An Ideological Victory and a Strategic Failure', Working Paper 88, Cold War International History Project, 13 December 2018.

[63] Julio Jeldres, 'Cambodia Relations with Vietnam: Historical Mistrust and Vulnerability', *Journal of Greater Mekong Studies*, Volume 2, Number 1, February 2020, p. 68.

[64] NSC Memorandum to Henry A. Kissinger on Peking and the Cambodian Issue (Secret/Sensitive/No Foreign Dissem), 26 May 1973.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. IP address: 18.118.193.82, on 31 Dec 2024 at 23:49:12, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009560078.002

a complete US withdrawal from Cambodia would lead to a vacuum which Moscow would exploit, hence they were vexed by Washington's lack of attention to the Cambodian problem.[65]

Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge had always wanted to get out of Vietnam's shadow, finally achieved it by liberating Cambodia on 17 April 1975 ahead of the Vietnamese. The timing was deliberate on the part of the Khmer Rouge to make the point that they could achieve victory without Vietnamese assistance and in fact even quicker. Five days later, on 22 April, the Vietnamese Politburo finally gave the go-ahead to launch the attack on Saigon. Saigon fell on 30 April marking the end of the Second Indochina War. We do not know what the Hanoi leadership thought of the fall of Phnom Penh. They were probably too engrossed in their own war in the South to think about the implications of the liberation of Cambodia by the Khmer Rouge for Vietnam–Cambodia relations.

IV

We now turn our focus to Sino-Vietnamese relations before the fall of Saigon on 30 April 1975. Like in the case of Cambodia–Vietnam relations, there is no need to go far back into pre-modern Vietnamese and Chinese histories to explain the already well-documented difficulties and challenges in their relationship.

The People's Republic of China (PRC), which came into being in the autumn of 1949, was the first country in the world to establish diplomatic relations with North Vietnam on 18 January 1950 during the time when the Vietnamese were engaged in a war of resistance against the French, commonly referred to as the 'First Indochina War'. With considerable Chinese military support, the war ended with the French defeat at the Battle of Dien Bien Phu on 7 May 1954. The Vietnamese communists claimed that they had been pressured by Beijing (and Moscow) to end the war prematurely instead of continuing the fight to unify the country. North Vietnamese officials also claimed that, despite their negotiating advantage, they were forced

[65] NSC Memorandum to Henry A. Kissinger on Peking and the Cambodian Issue (Secret/Sensitive/No Foreign Dissem), 26 May 1973; Priscilla Roberts (ed.), *Window on the Forbidden City: The Beijing Diaries of David Bruce 1973–1974* (University of Hong Kong, Centre of Asian Studies, 2001), pp. 33–34, 445–446.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. IP address: 18.118.193.82, on 31 Dec 2024 at 23:49:12, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009560078.002

to concede more than necessary during the subsequent negotiations with the French.[66]

The Vietnamese view is disputed by the Chinese side and the Sinophile Hoang Van Hoan (North Vietnam's first ambassador to China), as well as American historian Pierre Asselin, who recently argued that Hanoi accepted the provisions of the Geneva Agreements not because of Chinese and/or Soviet pressure but because they concurred with the Chinese view that 'implementation [of the agreements] would bring peaceful reunification and promote the cause of socialism in Vietnam'.[67] According to the Chinese, the Vietnamese communists, having expended all their energy and resources to achieve the historic Dien Bien Phu victory, did not have the capacity to liberate the entire country at that time and were thus reasonably happy with their gains at the conference table.[68]

In the wake of their triumphant victory over the French at Dien Bien Phu, there were indeed some exuberant segments in the Vietnamese leadership who believed that they could unite the country. As Wang Bingnan (secretary-general of the Chinese delegation to the 1954 Geneva Conference) recalled, 'some people in the Vietminh hoped to unify the whole of Vietnam at one stroke'.[69] At the same time, there were other Vietnamese leaders, significantly Ho Chi Minh, who concurred with the Chinese, although they differed on the terms of the temporary settlement. Ho recognised the difficulties ahead and the likelihood of having to fight against not only the French but also the Americans and was thus prepared to settle for a temporary settlement.[70] Rumours of US intervention were then rife because of the ambiguous statements made by then Secretary of State John Foster Dulles and the many diplomatic consultations between Washington, London, and Paris.

[66] *Vietnamese Foreign Ministry White Book on Relations with China*, FE/6238/6 October, FE/6242/11 October 1979; *Beijing Review*, 23 November 1979, 30 November 1979, and 7 December 1979.

[67] See Pierre Asselin, 'Choosing Peace: Hanoi and the Geneva Agreement on Vietnam, 1954–1955', *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Volume 9, Number 2, Spring 2007, pp. 95–126.

[68] See *Beijing Review*, 23 November 1979, 30 November 1979, and 7 December 1979

[69] Zhai Qiang, 'China and the Geneva Conference of 1954', *The China Quarterly*, Number 129, March 1992, p. 112.

[70] See *Beijing Review*, 23 November 1979, 30 November 1979, and 7 December 1979.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. IP address: 18.118.193.82, on 31 Dec 2024 at 23:49:12, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009560078.002

The Vietnamese and the Chinese preferences also diverged over recognition of the resistance governments of the Pathet Lao and Khmer Issarak, both protégés of the Vietminh. At the first plenary session of the Geneva Conference on 9 May 1954, the communist bloc was united in demanding that both the Pathet Lao and Khmer Issarak must be recognised and represented. The non-communist governments objected, leading to a month-long stalemate. On 10 June, British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden, one of the co-chairs of the conference, told the delegates that the differences were so wide that they must either make serious efforts to resolve them or accept failure. Three days later, Bedell Smith, the US assistant secretary of state, announced that he would be leaving Geneva at the end of the week. There were indications that the remaining ministers were also preparing to leave Geneva. A breakdown of the conference was imminent. On 16 June, in a restricted session between Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai and Anthony Eden, the Chinese broke ranks with the Vietminh when Zhou told the British foreign secretary that he could persuade the Vietminh to withdraw from Laos and Cambodia and that Beijing would recognise the royal governments of the two states on the condition that no American bases would be established there. According to James Cable, a member of the British delegation to the conference, 'after some polemics, Pham Van Dong (who was North Vietnam's Prime Minister and Head of the North Vietnamese delegation to the conference) seemed prepared, not very graciously, to acquiesce in Zhou's proposal'.[71]

Finally, the Chinese again pressured the Vietnamese to concede on the issue of the temporary demarcation of North and South Vietnam. Hoang Van Hoan recalled that he accompanied Zhou Enlai to consult with Ho Chi Minh in Liuzhou, a city near the Sino-Vietnamese border on 3–5 July 1954 concerning the temporary demarcation of North and South Vietnam and other issues. The Liuzhou meeting clearly showed Chinese pressure on the Vietnamese. Recent Vietnamese sources revealed that Ho and his top military commander, Vo Nguyen Giap, sought to gain the 13th parallel as the dividing line between North and South but were prepared to accept no less than the 16th parallel. Zhou said that he would try his best

[71] James Cable, *The Geneva Conference of 1954 on IndoChina* (London: Macmillan, 1986), p. 97.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. IP address: 18.118.193.82, on 31 Dec 2024 at 23:49:12, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009560078.002

to secure that, failing which he told an astonished Ho and Giap that they would have to settle for the 17th parallel. The 17th parallel was the demarcation line that John Foster Dulles had proposed to the French in late June. True enough, on 20 June, the Vietnamese side was forced to accept the 17th parallel.[72] At the Liuzhou meeting, Ho was also pressured to agree to the Chinese view that the Pathet Lao should only hold two provinces and the Khmer Issarak would be immediately demobilised. When the Geneva Agreements were eventually signed and the Chinese text was distributed describing how essential Chinese help had been in achieving the 'great victory', Pham Van Dong was incensed at China for having acquiesced to a division of the country. Privately, he felt that Zhou Enlai had double-crossed the Vietnamese revolution.[73]

Zhou Enlai never denied that he had put pressure on the Vietminh. The Chinese were able to negotiate directly with the French on fundamental points in reaching a solution to the Indochina question at the expense of the Vietnamese communists because Beijing was their sole military supplier and in control of the only aid supply route to Vietnam. When South Vietnam President Ngo Dinh Diem subsequently reneged on the Geneva Agreements in 1956, Zhou Enlai was apparently very upset although not surprised. He told Harrison Salisbury of the *New York Times* that 'never again' would he 'put pressure' on Hanoi to accept an international solution to the war modelled on the 1954 Geneva Conference. He himself had been 'personally responsible for urging the Vietnamese to go along with the agreement'.[74]

Notable among the Vietnamese who were angered by Chinese pressure at the 1954 Geneva Conference was Le Duan, who would eventually rise to become the first secretary of the VCP in 1960 until his death in 1986. This episode left a deep impression on him.[75]

[72] Priscilla Roberts (ed.), *Behind the Bamboo Curtain: China, Vietnam and the World beyond Asia* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2006), pp. 441–442.
[73] David Chanoff and Doan Van Toai, *Portrait of the Enemy: The Other Side of the War in Vietnam* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1987), p. 26.
[74] Harrison E. Salisbury, *To Peking and beyond: A Report on the New Asia* (New York: Quadrangle, 1973), pp. 225–226, cited in Zhai Qiang, 'China and the Geneva Conference of 1954', *The China Quarterly*, Number 129, March 1992, pp. 103–122.
[75] See Lien-Hang T. Nguyen, *Hanoi's War: An International History of the War for Peace in Vietnam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. IP address: 18.118.193.82, on 31 Dec 2024 at 23:49:12, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009560078.002

The Chinese tempered pressure with inducements and economic rewards. Having pressured the Vietnamese to concede to Chinese demands, in late November 1954, discussions on Chinese aid for North Vietnam's economic reconstruction began culminating in an agreement on a substantial aid package which was announced on 24 December 1954. According to the joint communiqué, Chinese aid would be given to rebuild the Hanoi–Nanguan railway, postal and telecommunication facilities, highway construction, civil air service, and water conservancy. Chinese experts would be sent to North Vietnam to give advice on technical matters. The monetary value of the aid package was not revealed, perhaps because China was having financial problems of its own and thus chose to emphasise their technical assistance rather than the monetary value of the aid package. The Chinese People's Relief Administration also donated 10,000 tons of rice and 5 million metres of cloth to the Vietnamese.[76] As Laura Calkins noted, by mid-1955, 'Sino-Vietnamese relations had reached a new plateau in cooperative consolidation which would help the Vietnamese to continue their struggle for unification'.[77] Between 1950 and mid-1978, the total value of China's military and economic aid (including grants and interest-free loans) to Vietnam amounted to more US$20 billion and exceeded that given by the Soviet Union. This is supposedly the 'largest in amount' and of the 'longest duration' among its foreign aid until 1978.[78]

Because of their dependence on Chinese economic and military assistance, Hanoi made it a point to seek Chinese views (but not always), and as far as possible, their concurrence as well. But despite this dependence, Hanoi resisted Chinese pressure to take their side during the Sino-Soviet split (the rift which began in 1956 and culminated in the severance of the relationship in 1969), sever relations with the Soviet Union, and move into the Chinese camp. Hanoi also refused to adhere to Chinese advice (and Moscow's as well)[79] to slow down

[76] Laura M. Calkins, *China and the First Vietnam War 1947–54* (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 127.

[77] See Laura M. Calkins, *China and the First Vietnam War 1947–54* (London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 126–130.

[78] Chinese sources from Xinhua and Renmin Ribao cited in B. E. Shinde, *Mao Zedong and the Communist Policies 1927–1978* (New Delhi: Sangam Books, 1993), pp. 95–96.

[79] Soviet assistance was not converted into proportionate political influence. See Ilya Gaiduk, *The Soviet Union and the Vietnam War* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1966).

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. IP address: 18.118.193.82, on 31 Dec 2024 at 23:49:12, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009560078.002

the pace of the war with the US. The Vietnamese communists were fully in control of their own decision-making in both the conduct of the war as well as the appropriate timing to negotiate with the US. Ho Chi Minh's death in September 1969 eroded Hanoi's finely calibrated relations with Beijing and Moscow. Ho was also very familiar with China and had good personal relations with the Chinese leadership,[80] which was not the case with Le Duan.

Hanoi was unhappy with both Beijing and Moscow for pursuing détente with the US while the Vietnam War was ongoing. But it was especially unhappy with the Chinese for the Nixon visit in February 1972. As Le Duc Tho recalled, 'the 1972 Agreement between the United States and China marked the beginning of the open and comprehensive collusion between imperialism and the Peking rulers'.[81] According to Ilya Gaiduk, although Chinese influence remained strong in Vietnam through the duration of the Vietnam War, by 1973, because of the Sino-US rapprochement, it had diminished considerably. Moscow was the beneficiary of this development. North Vietnamese officials from 1973 onwards expressed their preference for Soviet views and guidance on important domestic and foreign policy issues.[82] It is worth noting that Hanoi did not comment or report on Nixon's visit to Moscow in July 1974.

In January 1974, Saigon and Beijing clashed over the Paracel Islands, which both sides claimed to belong to them. The Chinese took control of the islands and henceforth 'the disputed islands … became a time-bomb in the Sino-Vietnamese relations until today'.[83] Beijing reiterated that it had 'indisputable' sovereignty over the Paracel, Spratly, and

[80] For details, see Ang Cheng Guan, *The Vietnam War from the Other Side: The Vietnamese Communists' Perspective* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002) and *Ending the Vietnam War: The Vietnamese Communists' Perspective* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004).

[81] Anthony Barnett, 'Interview with Le Duc Tho', in Anthony Barnett and John Pilger, *Aftermath: The Struggle of Cambodia and Vietnam*, NS Report 5, 1982, pp. 54–59.

[82] Ilya Gaiduk, *The Soviet Union and the Vietnam War* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1966), pp. 247–248; Stephen J. Morris, *The Soviet–Chinese–Vietnamese Triangle in the 1970s: The View from Moscow*, Working Paper 25, Cold War International History Project, April 1999, pp. 19–21.

[83] For an account of the naval battle, see Xiaobing Li, *The Dragon in the Jungle: The Chinese Army in the Vietnam War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), pp. 216–219.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. IP address: 18.118.193.82, on 31 Dec 2024 at 23:49:12, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009560078.002

Pratas Islands as well as the Macclesfield Bank.[84] Hanoi, preoccupied by its war with Saigon, could only raise a lame protest in private. In March 1974, Hanoi closed the only Chinese-language newspaper and suspended the activities of the Sino-Vietnamese Friendship Association. The high profile accorded to Khieu Samphan's visit to Beijing in April 1974, where he met Mao Zedong, compared to the low-key publicity given to Pham Van Dong's visit in the same month clearly showed that Sino-Vietnamese relations were not well. By August, Zhou was too ill to oversee the bilateral relationship and Le Thanh Nghi's visits to Beijing in August and October 1974 failed to extract any significant economic and military assistance from China. The relations deteriorated so much that the Chinese indicated that they were ready to have direct and independent contact with the Provisional Revolutionary Government in South Vietnam, bypassing Hanoi. While never publicly declared, it was not a secret that Beijing preferred two separate Vietnams rather than a united Vietnam as the latter could potentially pose a threat to China's south-western border.[85]

[84] 'Statement of the Spokesman of the Ministry of External Affairs of the PRC', 11 January 1974, *BBC/SWB/FE*/4459, 14 January 1974.

[85] See Ang Cheng Guan, *Ending the Vietnam War: The Vietnamese Communists' Perspective* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), pp. 164–165.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. IP address: 18.118.193.82, on 31 Dec 2024 at 23:49:12, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009560078.002