

I consider this setback to be a manoeuvre on the part of Sihanouk. Sihanouk always deals in contradictions. It was Sihanouk who proposed this meeting — not I, not Hun Sen, not Claude Cheysson [at that time Minister of External Relations]. The meeting was agreed to and then Sihanouk talked to the Chinese about it. He knows that the Chinese and Pol Pot will refuse. So why does he do this? To show them that he has a card to play; then they will make concessions. After that, Sihanouk will negotiate with Hun Sen to get even more concessions. That is the way he operates. It is Sihanouk at his old games.¹¹⁶

Is this comment still relevant two years later? Certainly such complicated negotiations require the use of gamesmanship and this is all the more true when Sihanouk is the principal actor. Nonetheless, several things have changed since 1985. Some of the necessary conditions have now been satisfied and this has combined with a more optimistic atmosphere to create expectations for success. If these are not realized there is likely to be a great deal of bitterness towards whoever is held responsible for the failure.

The increased pace of Sino-Soviet rapprochement and the renewal of detente, which has led to hopes of better relations between the United States and the Soviet Union are bound to affect a regional situation which has already changed in a variety of ways. It has been modified by:

- the change in the Vietnamese leaders and in the attitude of the 6th Congress of the Vietnamese Communist Party and the priority now given to economic reforms in order to restore and build up the country. The catastrophic state of the Vietnamese economy, its growing dependence on that of the Soviet Union and its need for international capital is now forcing Hanoi — although it is still not a matter of absolute necessity — to show greater flexibility;
- the recognition — as shown in point 2 of the joint communiqué issued by Sihanouk and Hun Sen in December 1987 — that “the Khmer problem” is one which must be

¹¹⁶ *Le Monde*, 6 April 1985, page 4.