

industry and handicrafts, Cambodians were relegated to a quasi-servile status as rice farmers and stock breeders, and largely confined to the small trades and low-paying jobs. The departing Vietnamese leave a void; the military protection they provided until recently, and the important roles they played in most aspects of life in Cambodia, will be gone. They will be replaced, but by whom? Pol Pot said in 1977: "...even if only a million Cambodians are left, the Chinese will provide me with the population I need..." The regime in Cambodia has changed again and again, but the "invaders" always remain – and they are not necessarily Vietnamese.

Even if there is success in the efforts to get Cambodia's neighbours – both the closest ones and those further removed – to leave this unfortunate country in peace, the issues not only of political independence but also of economic and cultural dependence, will remain. These factors will be determined by the amount and quality of the aid provided to Cambodia to help it reconstruct its economy and educate its youth, but above all by the degree to which the aid comes with few or no strings attached.

For ten years the government installed by Vietnam in Phnom Penh has been carrying out what is at once the most difficult and the easiest of tasks: starting from zero, to ensure the rebirth of the country at all levels by whatever meagre means it can contrive. But these means are now beyond reach. Material and economic gains are promptly absorbed by a runaway population explosion, the war effort and the need to replace equipment and an infrastructure that were themselves salvaged from debris. Apart from a mass return of the unfortunate refugees from the camps in Thailand, it is unlikely that the Cambodian diaspora is contemplating a return to the country in significant numbers. On the whole, the Cambodian emigrants have settled once and for all in the countries that, for the most part, warmly welcomed them. They have prospered; only rarely do their children speak Cambodian, and it would be difficult for them to return to the country even if peace were to be reestablished. Besides, Cambodians know only too well that they have never been masters in their own house.

The Military Stalemate. Recent military activity by the anti-government Coalition (CGDK) confirms that the Vietnamese

troops have indeed left Cambodia. In the past, their presence in the region was, of course, the major obstacle to the wider deployment of the anti-Hun Sen "resistance" forces. The current fighting is occurring because of the rainy season when conditions favour guerrilla operations. Is the purpose of these operations to provide the CGDK, at last, with a politically and militarily indispensable national territorial base?

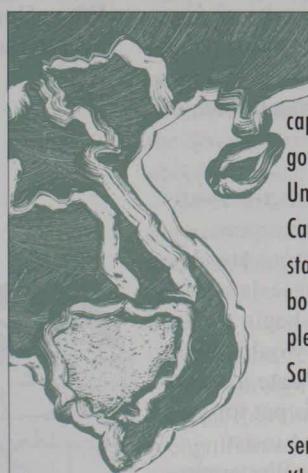
Two objectives are being pursued simultaneously. The seizure of Battambang or Angkor in the west, which would allow the Coalition to set up a government to rival the one in Phnom Penh, would have considerable international repercussions. Already, the occupation of a few villages in the Thai border zone, and the disappointing and well-publicized reimposition of the curfew in the capital, have given the impression abroad that the situation of the Hun Sen government has suddenly deteriorated. However, given the nature of the terrain in particular, it is hard to imagine that a sizeable military operation is imminent and that the current engagements could soon result in a decisive advantage for any of the forces. Each side denies it is firing on the villages, but then what about the landmines? The population is mobilized against its will, and the refugees from the

camps are being used as porters for crossing the minefields.

Up to now the tactic used by the Phnom Penh government has been to protect the most important positions with very dense minefields. If these positions are overrun, an effort is made to re-take them with the use of long-range artillery bombardments. However, the enemy is generally able to withdraw, taking with it the prisoners and equipment it has seized. Mobilization and recruitment are generally conducted by coercion. Soldiers fight with great courage but without particular aggressiveness. They are quick to abandon their positions. This is typical of the game of war in this part of Asia – a war between combatants of the same race. It was Mao Tse-tung who wrote that the art of winning a battle is to always leave intact a bridge across which the enemy can flee when hard pressed, and to avoid leaving him no alternative but desperate resistance, which risks the outcome of the battle.

THE OVERALL IMPRESSION IS ONE OF ABSURDITY: refugees and the civilian population are once again paying the cost and, with the exception of the Khmer Rouge and foreign-trained professionals, the combatants are unwilling participants. The fighting will continue, primarily because of its media impact on international public opinion. At issue in this struggle is the control of territory, with each party seeking to keep, obtain or balance its claims to legitimacy. It is unlikely that the conflict can be definitively settled on the battlefield and despite appearances, all sides seem convinced of this.

The parties are said to be sounding each other out over a possible resumption of negotiations. A "balanced" future for Cambodia, buried as it is between Thailand and Vietnam, can only be guaranteed by the dominant regional power – China. While the international community, lost in the Cambodian impasse, has neither the will nor the capacity to initiate a settlement, it would be hypocritical to pretend that there is any way other than by relying on China's magnanimity as the major force in the region. Paying the appropriate homage could, moreover, have a calming influence. It would be a disaster if the parties to the settlement of the Cambodian problem, at least those which have paid the costs so far, were to meet only on the battlefields – even if they are only Cambodians. □



CAMBODIA – CHANGES AT THE TOP SINCE 1975

In April 1975 the Khmer Rouge captured the capital Phnom Penh, routed the Lon Nol government and established Democratic Kampuchea. Under Pol Pot's leadership, more than one million Cambodians were executed, or died of disease and starvation. In December 1978 Vietnam invaded Cambodia, pushed out the Khmer Rouge, created the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK), and installed Heng Samrin as president and Hun Sen as prime minister.

Between 1975 and 1982, the Khmer Rouge represented Cambodia in the UN. While loath to support the Khmer Rouge because of their flagrant human rights abuses, many UN members were also reluctant to approve Vietnam's overthrow of Kampuchea's government. In 1982, with the encouragement of China and the countries of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Khmer Rouge joined with other non-communist opposition and guerrilla groups active against the Vietnamese-backed regime – the Armée nationale sihanoukiste (Prince Norodom Sihanouk's guerrilla force, ANS) and the Khmer People's National Liberation Front of Son Sann (KPNLF) – to form the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK). The UN now recognizes the CGDK as the legitimate government of Cambodia even though occupying the UN seat is about the only governmental action it carries out.