

Sihanouk had better ask to see Mr. Hun Sen and not foreign Minister Thach. I think if the Prince sought to do so, Phnom Penh would probably agree to a meeting.”<sup>100</sup>

A few days later it was the turn of Prime Minister Hun Sen (he retained his portfolio as Foreign Minister) to elaborate his position in an interview with a Thai newspaper:

We did not have a policy of collaborating with Sihanouk before. But now that we have destroyed Pol Pot's military bases, we feel that we are strong enough to talk about national reconstruction and unification of all Cambodians, regardless of the fact that Sihanouk has never once cooperated with us. We never think we have any problem with Sihanouk. Sihanouk can return to Cambodia immediately — tomorrow, if today he shakes off his ties with Pol Pot — so that he can prepare for the general elections.<sup>101</sup>

On 16 August 1985 the communiqué issued at the close of the Indochinese Foreign Ministers' Conference stated that the Vietnamese troops would be withdrawn from Kampuchea in 1990 and that the Government in Phnom Penh was ready to enter into negotiations with the various Khmer groups and individuals which were opposed to it, in order to discuss a process of national reconciliation based on the elimination of the Pol Pot clique.<sup>102</sup>

Finally on 2 September, the Khmer Rouge radio, the Voice of Democratic Kampuchea, announced that Son Sen would replace Pol Pot as commander in chief of the national army of Democratic Kampuchea.<sup>103</sup> The disappearance of Pol Pot came at a most opportune moment since it removed an obstacle to the negotiating process which had been under discussion for several months. One cannot dismiss the possibility that Beijing engineered this fortunate occurrence as part of its reciprocal concessions with the Soviet Union.

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<sup>100</sup> *SWB*, FE/8007/A3/1. 19 July 1985.

<sup>101</sup> *SWB*, FE/8009/A3/4. 22 July 1985.

<sup>102</sup> *Le Monde*, 17 August 1985, page 5.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 3 September 1985, page 3.