

UPDATE

STAYING THE COURSE FOR BRINGING PEACE TO CAMBODIA

(Updating Asian Studies Center *Backgrounder* No. 97, "Washington Should Listen to Its Friends and Take a More Active Role in Cambodia," December 14, 1989; *Backgrounder Update* No. 68, "The Cambodian Resistance Deserves Renewed U.S. Backing," February 1, 1988; Asian Studies Center *Backgrounder* No. 25, "Ten Years Later, Cambodia Still Bleeds," April 12, 1985.)

George Bush is being criticized for supporting aid to the non-communist Cambodian resistance. This is not a new issue. It dates back to 1979 when the Carter Administration, reacting to Vietnam's 200,000-man invasion of Cambodia, began providing small amounts of covert, non-lethal assistance to Cambodian non-communist resistance groups. In an improbable coalition, the non-communist guerrillas, together with the Chinese-supported Khmer Rouge, resisted Vietnam's occupation army and the puppet Cambodian government Hanoi had installed in Phnom Penh. Further complicating matters, the Phnom Penh regime was itself composed of former Khmer Rouge officials. While in power from 1975 until 1978, the Khmer Rouge were responsible for the deaths of at least one million Cambodians, the result of brutal regional infighting and starvation from failed communist agrarian policies.

Successful Drive. In 1985, the United States Congress took the lead in expanding aid to the non-communist resistance element of the coalition. During that year, Representative Stephen Solarz, the New York Democrat, spearheaded a successful drive to appropriate \$5 million in overt, non-lethal aid to both non-communist groups, the Khmer People's National Liberation Front and the Armee Nationale Sihanoukienne. His argument: strengthening the two non-communist factions would help prevent a return of the genocidal Khmer Rouge or a consolidation of power by the Vietnamese-backed Phnom Penh regime. The Reagan Administration approved of the congressional initiative and matched it with covert, non-lethal aid channeled through the Central Intelligence Agency.

Until 1989, support for the non-communist Cambodian resistance within Congress and the Administration remained high. In that year, however, Vietnam withdrew many, although not all, of its occupying forces from Cambodia. In response, liberal Democrats took aim at the modest \$31 million in U.S. support for the resistance. They argued that normalizing U.S. diplomatic and trade relations with Vietnam and softening the U.S. stand against the communist government in Phnom Penh would be the best safeguard against a return of the Khmer Rouge to power.

The Bush Administration wisely has shunned congressional pressure to reverse its Cambodia policy. The Administration has argued that because the Phnom Penh government is riddled with former Khmer Rouge officials and has amassed a dismal human rights record, it is an unacceptable alternative to the Khmer Rouge itself. What is more, the Administration notes, a softening of U.S. policy toward Hanoi and Phnom Penh would reduce pressure on both these governments to comply with United Na-

tions efforts to negotiate a settlement in Cambodia. In any such settlement, effective non-communist factions are vital to moderating the power held by the Khmer Rouge and the Phnom Penh regime.

The question of U.S. aid to the non-communist resistance now threatens to become a major confrontation between the Administration and congressional opponents. To appease some of the opposition, Bush last November ended all covert aid for the Cambodian resistance. As a result, Congress approved \$20 million in overt, non-lethal assistance to the non-communist resistance in the Fiscal 1991 Foreign Appropriations Bill. One limitation that the President was forced to accept, however, was a provision that all aid would cease if the non-communists cooperated, either "strategically or tactically," with the Khmer Rouge on the battlefield.

Of the \$20 million in allocated funds, the President is allowed to spend \$7 million immediately without prior notification to Congress. The State Department, however, sensitive about offending Capitol Hill, has spent nothing. Only on April 18, after receiving petitions from members of Congress who support the non-communist resistance, did the State Department agree to spend the first \$7 million, and then only with the understanding that it be used primarily to help the civilian refugee populations under control of the non-communist resistance.

Challenging Aid. Congressional opponents now are mobilizing against even this half-measure. On April 18, the same day that the State Department approved spending the first \$7 million, Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell sent a letter co-signed by twelve other Senators and Congressmen to Bush. Claiming that non-communist Cambodian guerrillas have cooperated on the battlefield with Khmer Rouge units while battling Phnom Penh's military, and invoking the "anti-cooperation" provision of the 1991 Foreign Appropriations Bill, the letter charges that any further U.S. aid to the non-communists would violate U.S. law. With its evident threat to Administration policy, the letter aims to do to the non-communist Cambodian resistance what the Boland Amendment did to the Reagan Administration's support for Nicaraguan freedom fighters — cut them off entirely from American assistance.

While the State Department carefully avoids confrontations with Congress, and congressional opponents of the Administration's policy turn Cambodia into a partisan issue to attack the President and usurp his ability to conduct U.S. foreign policy, the situation inside Cambodia is fast deteriorating. The non-communist resistance, uncertain of continued American support, is suffering defeats on the battlefield. In addition, the more than 200,000 civilian refugees that the two non-communist factions administer may now be deprived of much needed U.S. humanitarian aid. Finally, the major military offensive Phnom Penh launched against the non-communist resistance at the beginning of this year continues its success.

To meet this latest congressional challenge, and to help bring about a negotiated settlement in Cambodia, Bush should take several steps aimed at safeguarding his Indochina policy. Among them:

◆ ◆ **Immediately dispatch the first \$7 million in aid to the non-communist resistance.** This first installment of non-lethal humanitarian aid, which requires no congressional notification, desperately is needed by the civilian populations under the protection of the non-communist resistance. Bush must not allow congressional threats such as the April 18 Mitchell letter further to delay sending this much-needed U.S. support.

◆ ◆ **Order the Director of Central Intelligence to report on the continued presence of Vietnamese troops in Cambodia.** Congressional opponents of Bush's Indochina policy argue that Vietnam has pulled all its troops out of Cambodia and, as a result, the U.S. should begin to normalize relations with Hanoi. In fact, U.S. intelligence sources indicate that not only have Vietnamese military advisors and support units remained in Cambodia, but Vietnamese soldiers actually have been supporting Phnom

Penh's latest attack on the non-communist resistance. A comprehensive study of these findings has never been presented to Congress. Bush, therefore, should direct U.S. intelligence agencies to prepare a report on Vietnam's military presence in Cambodia since 1989, when Hanoi claims to have withdrawn its troops. This report should be made available to the appropriate congressional committees, and used by the Administration to underscore its insistence that Hanoi stop interfering in Cambodian affairs before the U.S. restores normal diplomatic relations with Vietnam.

◆ ◆ **Direct U.S. intelligence agencies to report on the role of former members of the Khmer Rouge in the Phnom Penh regime.** Many opponents of Bush's Indochina policy insist that the Phnom Penh regime is an acceptable alternative to the Khmer Rouge. Yet, most senior officials in Phnom Penh, including Prime Minister Hun Sen and President Heng Samrin, once held positions of authority in the Khmer Rouge. Many of these people, in fact, have been implicated in human rights abuses both while serving in the Khmer Rouge and under the current regime. To refute congressional critics, Bush should order the U.S. intelligence community to prepare comprehensive biographies of those Phnom Penh officials known to have participated in human rights abuses against the Cambodian people.

◆ ◆ **Pressure France and Indonesia to host settlement talks among the four Cambodian factions.** Since early 1989, France and Indonesia have taken the lead in hosting U.N.-sponsored talks aimed at producing a negotiated Cambodian settlement. Over the past year these talks have been stalemated, owing largely to the intransigence of the Phnom Penh regime and Vietnam. Because neither Jakarta nor Paris wants to host a new round of talks likely to end in failure, the negotiation process has stagnated. Phnom Penh, whose military offensive against the non-communists is doing well, is pleased by this delay; the non-communists, whose men are dying on the battlefield, want negotiations to proceed. The Bush Administration should increase its diplomatic efforts, and pressure France and Indonesia immediately to resume U.N. settlement talks. Finally, Bush should make a strong public statement condemning Phnom Penh's intransigence.

With the image of the U.N. as an effective peacekeeper boosted by recent experience in the Persian Gulf, the moment should be seized to produce an international settlement in Cambodia. George Bush should continue his current policy of aiding the non-communist resistance, and supporting U.N.-sponsored negotiating efforts. It is the best chance for bringing peace to wartorn Cambodia.

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