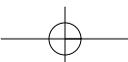
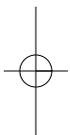


PART IX
Undermining Extreme Maoist
Insurrections in the Third World



CHAPTER 23

Preventing Overt U.S. Involvement
in a Second Indochinese War

A visit to Vietnam and Cambodia stimulates intense interest in preventing the return to power of the genocidal Cambodian faction, the Khmer Rouge, which has been fighting in coalition with two other factions in seeking to overturn the Vietnamese-installed government. Efforts are made to change the U.S. policy of supporting this coalition. Supporters of the policy overreach by seeking to authorize the sending of weapons overtly to parts of the coalition. By energizing a subcommittee of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, overt U.S. involvement in the Cambodian civil war is prevented.

In May 1979 a Vietnamese surgeon, Ton That Tung, came to the United States as the guest of the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) and addressed a small seminar convened by FAS on the effects of herbicides sprayed in Vietnam during the war. This was of interest not only to the Vietnamese but also to the American veterans of that conflict.⁴²⁰ We proposed sending a delegation to Vietnam, and a telegram of July 6 from the National Center for Scientific Research arrived “officially inviting” an FAS delegation. But trouble intervened.

The first obstacle turned out to be the Vietnamese effort to force Chinese residents in Vietnam to leave—“assisted departures,” it was called. They had become boat people. The same day, I sent Nguyen Van Hieu, the president of the National Center of Scientific Research, a telegram that stated, “Our scientists disturbed about the expulsion of ethnic Chinese from Vietnam by sea. Regret FAS Delegation must await resolution of boat-people crisis.”⁴²¹

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Our second obstacle was the Cambodian famine. In Christmas of 1978, the Vietnamese had invaded Cambodia in an effort to overthrow the genocidal regime of the Khmer Rouge, led by Pol Pot. It took them only three weeks to overturn the regime, so exhausted was the country and so incompetent, militarily, were the Cambodians, compared to the Vietnamese. The Cambodian people, despite their historic enmity toward the Vietnamese, welcomed them as liberators. The Khmer Rouge had killed 25 percent of the Cambodian population and were continuing their massacres. They had killed off all the experts as Western-trained, including especially anyone who spoke a foreign language. The country was in a nose dive.

Six months after the invasion, the food supply was so meager that famine loomed. The press was calling the situation desperate, and the general tendency was to blame the Vietnamese. On October 3 I went to New York, met with Vietnamese ambassador Ha Van Lau at the UN mission, and put off our visit to Hanoi until we could be assured that the Vietnamese were allowing food into Cambodia.

On October 17 we held a press conference showcasing America's most experienced specialist on famine, Dr. Jean Mayer, the president of Tufts University. Experienced in Biafran and Bangladesh relief efforts, he deplored the efforts on behalf of Cambodia as "wholly inadequate—financially, logistically, and diplomatically." His statement pointed out, in particular, that the situation was complicated by the fact that the Vietnamese were themselves short of food "by as much as 2 million tons."⁴²²

Our press release said we were "reluctantly deferring the date at which a delegation might be sent [to Hanoi] until FAS could determine that the Vietnamese would cooperate fully with international relief agencies, both themselves and through their influence with the Heng Samrin government in Phnom Penh."⁴²³

In retrospect, I consider our decision to put off our visit to have been a mistake; it would have been better to go and find out what was happening. But Heng Samrin's Vietnam-imposed regime in Phnom

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Penh was refusing to permit humanitarian aid to come in. And I actually thought—and wrote—that Vietnam might be considering a “final solution” to the problem of Cambodia by depopulating it.⁴²⁴ Fortunately, this article was not published, because I do not believe it now—at all. In fact, I believe that the Vietnamese cut their own rations to help the Cambodians, as Ambassador Ha Van Lau told us.

I am embarrassed that it took a full decade for us to propose another visit to Hanoi. I cannot now recall just what got me started again, but I know that the vehicle was John McAuliffe, the executive director of the U.S.-Indochina Reconciliation Project. He was running, among other things, an entirely legal underground railroad that furnished information to outsiders on how, exactly, one could get to Vietnam despite the various restrictions on traveling there. (For example, one could not book flights for internal travel in Vietnam or even get a travel agent to book a flight to Saigon.) While arranging the trip, John asked me if I wanted to go to Cambodia, too. There was, he said, a war on. I instantly agreed; in the end, the war in Cambodia became my three-year obsession, eclipsing my concern with scientific exchange with Vietnam (although I continued to work on that also, as shown below).

In January 1989 I was in Moscow for a meeting of the International Foundation for the Survival and Development of Humanity. My visit to Vietnam and Cambodia was already set for February, and I decided to visit the Cambodian embassy to meet the ambassador, Hor Namhong, who was said to be quite skillful.

He turned out to be candid, intelligent, and charming. I realized that he was at the absolute top of his diplomatic career since for Cambodia, Russia was the most important ally. I decided on the spot to invite him to Washington, and he accepted; I even called on the U.S. ambassador, Jack Matlock, to tell him that I had done so. (His attitude was, “So?” Matlock may have known more than I did. Because of the State Department’s resistance, it took me three years to make good on this invitation.)

On my arrival in Hanoi on February 10, 1989, my Vietnamese host,

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Nguyen Van Hieu, turned out to be a Lenin Prize winner in elementary particle physics and a member of the Vietnamese Central Committee. The most brilliant of the Vietnamese students had been sent to Russia to sit out the Vietnam War, so he ended up being trained at an elite atomic research laboratory in Dubna. He turned out to be a kind of Vietnamese Velikhov, a genial operator, full of plans and ideas. The Vietnamese, a Sinic people, shared the Chinese aptitude in science. And Nguyen Van Hieu's forty-odd lieutenants, each working in a different field, all seemed quite with it. The state could not support their efforts, and so they were using "free enterprise" to round up funds for their research by selling the products of their ingenuity: new strains of rice, new perfumes, and so on.

It felt strange to be in Hanoi, the target of the "Christmas bombing" during the war, an act that FAS had denounced as "playing Russian roulette with the city of Hanoi" and "immoral and inexcusable."⁴²⁵ The Christmas bombing had, in fact, closed down an attempt I had made, during the war, to go to Hanoi to assess the damage from U.S. bombings. A Vietnamese official, told of this, advised me that "we knew that an American scholar was trying to come." And I suppose that was me.

The country was so poor that a single bottle of Pepsi was, in fact, a week's wage for a scientist. And when we met with the famous Mrs. Nguyen Thi Binh, who had been the foreign minister for the Provisional Revolutionary Government of the Republic of South Vietnam (i.e., the Vietcong), she was bundled up in a very cold building without heat.

In 1989, the year of my visit to Hanoi, the decade-old Vietnamese-installed government in Phnom Penh was under attack by a coalition of three groups: the Khmer Rouge, still under the command of Pol Pot; a royalist faction under the command of Prince Ranariddh; and a democratic faction led by former prime minister Son Sann. Since the war was still on, it was quite unclear whether the Cambodian forces of the Phnom Penh government could hold up their end of the war without the help of the Vietnamese army.

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Under U.S. and Chinese influence, the UN General Assembly had voted that the Khmer Rouge should hold the Cambodian UN seat, and hence the Phnom Penh government was ineligible for developmental UN aid. Cambodia was almost completely isolated and ostracized. When I asked Nguyen Thi Binh whether Vietnam could be depended upon to protect the Cambodians from Pol Pot after their withdrawal, she said, “We have done all in our capacity to help the Cambodians recover from the genocide. The international community has a responsibility now. Only Vietnam has helped Cambodia so far. Other countries, including the United States, now have to help. We have done what we can. We have to help ourselves now. Independence means we have to have food and clothing.”

Later I met with the internationally respected Nguyen Co Thach, Vietnam’s foreign minister since 1970 (and deputy prime minister for the same period), and with General Nguyen Giap, who had led the victorious fight against the French at Dien Bien Phu. The Vietnamese appointed him defense minister during the war with the United States to persuade the Americans that the same thing could happen to them; in fact, others really ran the war. Now, as deputy prime minister, he called my visit “the first birds of spring,” saying that the arrival of scientists signified impending normalization of relations. He did not think the Khmer Rouge would succeed in returning because “I have never see the criminals make a successful comeback.”

The scientist Nguyen Van Hieu and I traveled together by plane and car from Hanoi to Saigon (now named Ho Chi Minh City), where we visited with the southern part of his establishment under the vice president of the Center for Scientific Research, Ho Si Thoang. It was very pleasant to be back in Asia, with its socially



The author with General Giap, the victor over the French at Dien Bien Phu

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The author, President Nguyen Van Hieu of the Center for Scientific Research of Vietnam, Senator Ted Kennedy, and Vice President Ho Si Thoang

sophisticated peoples and ethic of hard work. The country was not free, of course, but its press was starting to print unpleasant facts about the government—very carefully. And it seemed like things were easing up.

At the Ho Chi Minh airport, waiting for the weekly flight to Phnom Penh on February 22, I was about to enter a country at only a decade's remove from total devastation. For four years in the seventies,

during the reign of Pol Pot, all schooling had been stopped, so there was not a single ten-year-old in the country who could read and write when the regime was deposed by the Vietnamese invaders. Some twenty thousand people had been tortured to death during Pol Pot's murderous reign. Up to two million others had perished in his fratricidal terrors. The possibility that this regime might now be restored to power, backed by outside aid and a coalition, seemed both real and terrifying.

A fellow passenger on my flight to Phnom Penh, who had been Prince Sihanouk's representative to the United States, told me how the two noncommunist opponents of the Vietnam-sponsored government of Hun Sen—the Prince's faction and a democratic faction—had been forced, by Western pressure, to fight in an alliance with the Khmer Rouge, whom they hated.

But few had really expected that this coalition would prevail against a Vietnamese-backed government. Now that the Vietnamese were withdrawing their forces, some Western backers of the coalition were having second thoughts.

After a touring Phnom Penh, and accumulation of background information, I was granted a meeting with Prime Minister Hun Sen on February 27.  The prime minister gave long answers, but

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they were earnest and friendly and not unskillful. He seemed modest and well informed. There was not a lot of Marxist jargon. He said he was encouraging American Khmer to come home.⁴²⁶

On March 1, in hearings before his subcommittee, Congressman Stephen Solarz said he was seriously considering pressing for military aid to the Sihanouk forces on the grounds that the Vietnamese were withdrawing. I thought that the last best bulwark against the “fate worse than death” (i.e., the Khmer Rouge) was certainly the Hun Sen government and *not* Prince Sihanouk, who was in an alliance with the Khmer Rouge and would use the U.S. aid against Hun Sen. On my return to Washington, on March 3, I began a round of consultations with interested parties (Dalena Wright in Congressman Atkin’s office; Mo Steinbruner at the Committee on National Policy; Bill Herod of the Indochina Project; the Chinese ambassador, Han Xu; the analyst Fred Brown; and the Soviet embassy counselor Yevgeny Afanasyev). By March 11 I had prepared and released a fifteen-page analysis of what was wrong with our policy.⁴²⁷ On March 15 I published an op-ed piece in *The Los Angeles Times* entitled “U.S. Policy Punishes Cambodian Survivors.”

The State Department was refusing to see me except at the desk level, and since I had interviewed the prime minister, I thought I deserved better. In the end, on March 29, through the intercession of a friend who had a high position at State, I got a hearing with William Clark (the acting assistant secretary for East Asian and Pacific affairs). It turned out that one reason for the delay was State’s fear that Hun Sen might have given me a “message” for them that they did not want to receive.

I considered the State Department’s policy to be nothing short of criminal—genocidal, in fact—and so the meeting was tense. Clark was very polite, but the deputy assistant secretary, David Lambertson, was not. On April 11, the Open Forum of the Department of State furnished an opportunity for me to give a talk criticizing the department’s policy—and even provided lunch afterwards. It was, I think, the third of four such opportunities that

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this splendid organization had given me over twenty-five years. But no one from Lambertson's staff attended; I heard later that he had called a meeting at the same time to prevent them from being subverted. And at the lunch after my talk, held in the State Department lunchroom, only members of the human rights staff and the Chinese desk were present—but they were very friendly.

On April 12, desperate to sound the alarm, I wrote a letter addressed simultaneously to three former secretaries of state: Henry A. Kissinger, Edmund Muskie, and Cyrus Vance. I felt the issue was above my pay grade and that the burden should be put on the shoulders of my elders. The letter said that based on a recent trip, I had concluded that the Khmer Rouge will "emerge the winner" and that FAS was appealing to them "separately and jointly" to do something to prevent a "second holocaust in Cambodia." The letter made a few suggestions, indicated what line we were taking, and asked them to help Cranston, to oppose military aid, and to take any additional measures they deemed appropriate.

I never received a response from any of the three. But some months later, I read in the newspapers that Muskie was in Hanoi en route to Phnom Penh. I later picked up the news that he had called my friend Alton Frye about my letter and had asked Alton what he thought. From this I deduced that the letter might have helped turn Muskie on.

Finally, on April 14, I secured a meeting with Senator Alan Cranston, the chair of the Asian subcommittee of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Alan readily agreed to hold hearings on this issue of "lethal aid," and a big fight broke out on the issue.

Solarz, Cranston's counterpart in the House, was refusing to receive me. We finally met, but on the set of a television talk show—CBS's *Nightwatch*, where he and I debated the issue with the host, Charlie Rose. Solarz called me an "apologist for the Hun Sen Government" and other names. Rose, a friend of Solarz's, did everything possible to help Solarz. Finally, just to get in my two bits, I asked, "Who is running this show?"—a comment which, by

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nighttime when the show ran, they managed to suppress electronically. Afterwards, I asked Solarz if he was going to see me, and he said, "Why? What do you know about it?" and turned on his heel.

Eventually I organized a meeting with Nina Solarz, the congressman's wife, thanks to the intervention of the FAS's team of women assigned to congressional exchange. She was then director of the Fund for Peace. It was embarrassing to be reduced to dealing with the congressman's spouse, but I was determined. I said that if her husband did propose lethal aid, he would be defeated in the subsequent vote.

On May 8, *The Washington Post* editorialized that it was "far-fetched to dally with the idea that, at this late date, a hesitant United States can add substantially and usefully to its own direct influence by supplying military aid to the weakest military links in the Cambodian equation." The issue was clearly on the minds of increasing numbers of people. On May 9, the Asia Society heard Solarz. Asked by someone from the floor what he thought of the position Bill Colby and I had articulated in several recent op-ed pieces, he said something insulting about me; I just quietly walked out.

On May 15 I was invited to the Soviet embassy to meet with the Asian specialist, Afanasyev, and his superior, a man named Kutovoy. They were visibly excited. They said that President Gorbachev had received a letter I had written, that I would receive a letter confirming this, and that they wanted to pass along some comments.^[428]

It happened this way. On April 5, realizing that Gorbachev was going to meet with Premier Deng Xiaoping of China—the main backer of the Khmer Rouge—I had dared to write, urging that Gorbachev not sell out the Cambodians. ("We hope that . . . improvement in relations will not come at the cost of a return of the Khmer Rouge to control of Cambodia.") I quoted Deng Xiaoping's comments about the Vietnamese ("dogs," "ungrateful" and "cocky") to show why China was supporting the genocidal Khmer Rouge. And I detailed the more naive of Prince Sihanouk's comments. (The Khmer Rouge have "given me their oath that they will observe a multiparty system . . . with free economy with press freedom.")

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My letter proposed that Gorbachev appeal to the U.S. president to agree to the following:

The central goal of U.S. and Soviet policy toward Cambodia should be to preclude any possibility of a second Khmer Rouge takeover, which would prevent, forever, any further opportunities for democracy and freedom, whether socialist or capitalist or some combination, in that area. Accordingly, both the U.S. and the Soviet Union should encourage, and try to unite, all factions which oppose the Khmer Rouge organization while denying assistance to all Cambodian elements who ally themselves with it.

I urged a non-Khmer Rouge coalition in which Gorbachev would begin supporting Sihanouk to the extent that he left the Khmer Rouge and began joining with Hun Sen. Meanwhile, the United States would move toward supporting Hun Sen while denying support to Sihanouk insofar as the prince failed to leave the Khmer Rouge coalition. My speculation is that his deputy foreign minister for Asia, Igor Rogachev—whom I had met in January 1988 and with whom I had established a warm rapport—liked the idea and helped the letter get through to Gorbachev.

On May 16, at the Council on Foreign Relations, I debated with the deputy assistant secretary of state, David Lambertson. By this time I had read a large fraction of the books in English on Cambodia and was armed with quotations from everybody and his brother; I was ready to debate anyone. And I was very passionate about the issue. Despite the fact that Lambertson had a good many friends in the audience—one who even came forward and seized the podium in an effort to help him—I felt that I had won hands down.

I asked the Arms Control and Foreign Policy Caucus of the House of Representatives to organize a luncheon for me to debate the issue of lethal aid. The Defense Department sent a deputy assistant secretary, Carl Ford. We met before eighteen House and Senate members and, again, I felt I did quite well. I was also having fruitful discussions with Strobe Talbott, who devoted three of his

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Time magazine columns to this subject. He urged changing the order of battle on the ground from “three against one,” with the one being the Hun Sen, to “three against one,” with the one being the Khmer Rouge—the same approach I had urged on Gorbachev.⁴²⁹ Finally, I persuaded another forum, Face-to-Face, to let me debate the assistant secretary of state, Richard Solomon (unfortunately, we were featured on separate days, since he declined to debate). All the while we were, of course, lobbying the Senate.

June 14 was the birthday of Ann Druyan, who was then the secretary of FAS. Her husband, the astronomer Carl Sagan, had arranged an elaborate three-day cruise for Annie and forty guests on a boat with a sign that read, in extremely large letters, “Carl Loves Annie.” B.J. and I were among the guests. On Sunday morning, June 19, while aboard the boat, I saw that *The New York Times* had a front-page story showing that I had won on lethal aid. In view of the fact that thirty-three important senators, including Robert Byrd, were dead set against lethal aid to Prince Sihanouk, the State Department had decided it would not send it. My decision to bypass the House of Representatives, where Solarz reigned supreme, and base the fight against lethal aid on a Senate investigation by Senator Cranston had carried the day. This was the end of my first round on Cambodia.

At the end of Sunday, as we returned to the train station in a taxi, we heard on the radio the news that my father had died. Thus began a tremendous outpouring of commendations, including, in *The Washington Post* alone, at least six op-ed tributes, an editorial, and a very kind obituary. The journalists were at pains to give a respected member of their own fraternity a real send-off. And they were right to do so. I. F. Stone was, among other things, a brilliant and committed commentator, physically and morally courageous, hardworking, and learned. He was also quite a good father, especially in letting his children find their own way. In particular, had he been less tolerant, I might not have been willing to join Herman Kahn at the Hudson Institute, and all these adventures would have died aborning.