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## SOUTHEAST ASIA

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# DOS backs Peking's Cambodia plan

by Ramtanu Maitra

The five-day conference on Kampuchea sponsored by the United Nations capitulated to Chinese demands, opening the door to a return to power of the Pol Pot forces. This was in direct contrast to a draft written by the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN—Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Philippines) which called for disarming all factions including the murderous Khmer Rouge and for U.N. peacekeeping forces following a Vietnamese withdrawal. Participants in the conference explained that the adoption of a French “compromise” acceding to China’s objections to the ASEAN draft was possible only because the U.S. delegation led by Alexander Haig, twisted the arms of other attendees to go along with China.

The ASEAN nations are genuinely seeking a solution, though their present proposals for Vietnamese withdrawal, U.N. peacekeeping forces, and an interim government to run free elections are seen as unrealizable. Vietnam boycotted the conference, saying China’s support for Pol Pot represented the real threat to stability in Southeast Asia. Vietnamese ambassador Ha Van Lau reminded a press conference that Pol Pot had murdered half of Kampuchea’s population. He referred to earlier statements that Vietnam would withdraw its troops from Kampuchea when China ended support for Pol Pot.

China, on the other hand, stated explicitly that it seeks to keep the fighting going in Kampuchea in order to “bleed” Vietnam, and that it seeks the return of Pol Pot to power. On these grounds Peking and Washington strongarmed the conference into deleting calls for the disarming of all factions, references to an interim administration and to U.N. peacekeeping forces. The final draft simply hopes “armed factions will not be able to prevent or disrupt the holding of free elections” [emphasis added].

China’s open efforts to reestablish the bloody-handed Pol Pot, while disregarding the ASEAN draft, has its roots in the recently evolved U.S. policy toward China. Haig’s decision to lift the U.S. ban to sell advanced weapons to China last month encouraged the Chinese to take this militant posture, in defiance of ASEAN, against Vietnam. Haig, while addressing the U.N. on the inau-

gural day of the conference, echoed the Chinese line and called for an economic blockade against Vietnam. The purpose is the same as that of the Chinese—to ‘bleed’ Vietnam. U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs John Holdridge, speaking before the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee on July 15, called for “diplomatic isolation and economic deprivation” against Hanoi. Holdridge went on to say, “This policy of isolation and pressure is, of course, supplemented by the presence on Vietnam’s northern border of hundreds of thousands of Chinese troops and the continuing guerrilla activity of several resistance groups inside Kampuchea.”

This is not the first time John Holdridge has threatened Vietnam. Last month, while accompanying Haig on his trip through China and southwest Asia, Holdridge threatened that the U.S. would “exert economic, political and, yes, military pressure on Vietnam.” During the U.N. conference, the U.S. proved that those were not rhetorical words.

Attendees were shocked that China dropped its previous lip service to some sort of anti-Vietnam “united front,” and insisted on the return of Pol Pot. They suggested that China’s extremism came in response to the realization, following the ASEAN nations’ summit in June, that the Southeast Asian nations objected to U.S. arms to China and that they wanted to end the Kampuchea tension rather than keep it going as China desired. During the U.N. conference, for example, ASEAN spokesman S. Dhanabalan of Singapore directly countered China’s language by saying ASEAN had no intention to “bleed” anyone, or to bring any people “to their knees.” He added “We are not here to put Vietnam on trial.” China, thus, dropped its “reasonable” posture.

China’s intransigence at the U.N. is likely to increase existing resentments among the Southeast Asian nations. Since Haig’s China trip such resentment has become more explicit. The *Christian Science Monitor* reported last week that in a meeting with the ASEAN foreign ministers in Manila last month, U.S. Secretary of State Alexander Haig irritated some of the ASEAN leaders by “coming on too strong” against Vietnam, with a too-strong pro-China tilt. Kuala Lumpur International Service in its July 14 commentary said, “Hanoi has never failed to hide the fact that it is most wary of China. Its contention has been that once its forces have withdrawn from Kampuchea, it would only lead to the return of the Pol Pot forces and that would pose a serious threat to its well-being all over again. Vietnam has good cause to worry about this danger.”

It is becoming clearer by the day that the U.S.-China alliance against Vietnam is a growing concern amongst the Southeast Asian nations, and by playing its “China Card,” the U.S. will end up having only one ally in Southeast Asia—China.