

Khmer Rouge announcement that they have “dissolved” the communist party, indicating that Peking will concede on matters of form, but will not abandon the substance of backing for the Pol Pot guerrilla war.

Singapore also announced its willingness to supply arms to the “coalition” and urged others, obviously the United States in particular, to do so as well. This directly contradicted earlier ASEAN opposition to military aid by its members to the Khmer groups.

The immediate reaction of Indonesia, expressed in an unusual public fashion by Foreign Minister Mochtar, was to denounce Singapore. The ASEAN Foreign Ministers’ meeting on Dec. 10 in Phatthaya, Thailand was called to come up with a unified ASEAN position. The Thai-Singapore grouping, which has been closer to China all along, gained the support of Malaysian Foreign Minister Ghazalie Shafie, who echoed the Singapore line.

The compromise final statement of the ASEAN ministers supported the “loose coalition” proposal while explicitly stating that they had cleared up the “misunderstanding” about supply of arms, and that “it was agreed at the meeting that ASEAN will not get involved with any military assistance.” The Indonesians threatened to leave ASEAN if such a move were made; according to diplomatic sources in Washington, they are ready to accept the Heng Samrin government but cannot yet do so publicly without splitting ASEAN.

INTERVIEW

Son Sann, former Cambodian Premier

The following interview with former Cambodian Premier Son Sann, now leader of the exile Khmer People’s National Liberation Front, was conducted in Washington, D.C. on Dec. 5 by EIR Bureau Chief Richard Cohen.

Cohen: Could you tell us the purpose of your visit to the U.S. at this time?

Son Sann: I have come here at this time in order to expose the situation in Cambodia. Since I last visited, there is something new—the Singapore meeting, the joint statement [of the three anti-Vietnamese Khmer groups] signed in Singapore in the beginning of September. After that there were many meetings of the Ad Hoc Committee. But now there is a new solution. Recently, Singapore and Thailand proposed a loose coalition agreement. I have come here to expose the new solution to our American friends and to our countrymen. I have to go to the West Coast to meet with my countrymen,

and as usual, I have the possibility and the privilege to see some official personalities in the State Department.

Cohen: I understand you met with Mr. Holdridge [Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia] and Mr. Stoessel [Undersecretary for Political Affairs]?

Son Sann: Yes; we need now very urgently humanitarian aid because the people come more and more in our zone from inside Cambodia because of the famine.

Cohen: So you have not come for military aid, just for food and medical aid?

Son Sann: Food and medicine and some equipment so the people can grow vegetables and other things. These people want to work for themselves but we do not have the money or the means and what we receive in U.S. military aid is now essential. I want to tell you that my requests met with a sympathetic answer.

Cohen: In the negotiations going on between your organization, Sihanouk’s group and the Khmer Rouge, have there been points of disagreement following the Singapore meeting on the question of the coalition?

Son Sann: I have to tell you very frankly, we were very reluctant to go to Singapore because the people inside [Cambodia] and our countrymen outside, they don’t like us to be in a coalition with the Khmer Rouge. But after consulting the people inside I was allowed to go to Singapore.

I went there knowing in advance we had nothing to gain in Singapore. But we wanted to show our good faith. The benefit was to the Khmer Rouge because they can sit in the U.N. with increasing recognition, and they could use my name inside Cambodia to make propaganda telling the people that I am now with them. But the people know the truth.

Cohen: So you fear that the Khmer Rouge is using your name for their own purposes?

Son Sann: Yes. They are using my name in order to get into the villages. You see, they are stronger than us now because they receive large amounts of aid from where you know [China—D.S.] but they have no new recruits.

We have plenty of men, but we do not have enough weapons. We have 9,000 soldiers with weapons but we have 3,000 others without arms.

Cohen: The Khmer Rouge is getting arms from the People’s Republic of China. Where are you getting arms?

Son Sann: I can tell you the truth. Last year I was in Peking with my friends here because Deng Xiaoping used to say we are willing to help every movement fighting the enemy [the Vietnamese—D.S.]. I went there after Christmas time last year and I said we want arms. They agreed to give us a small contribution. Now this

contribution has been used. I tell you everything. I want your friendship. I want you to help me.

Cohen: There has been a recent proposal from Malaysian Foreign Minister Shafie where he proposes a coalition including Heng Samrin.

Son Sann: Where did you get that information?

Cohen: We got it from published reports [the statement by Shafie was made at an ASEAN meeting in London—D.S.].

Son Sann: I can give you a scoop. I met Shafie in Bangkok last Saturday. He announced to us that his government is willing to give us an important financial contribution. He had made a statement the day before we met in private. He had said that Son Sann has told him that Son Sann is willing to negotiate with the enemy when they withdraw their troops. Then, in his thinking, Heng Samrin might join a coalition [government]. Do you think if one day, the enemy agree to go with the Khmer Rouge, Sihanouk, and myself to an international conference in New York and to negotiate—do you think they will not ask Heng Samrin into the coalition? They will do so. This is natural.

Cohen: Is the Khmer Rouge resisting a coalition as proposed in Singapore?

Son Sann: In Singapore they have all the benefits. With my signature, they sit in the United Nations and make propaganda. But since then I withdrew myself from the Ad Hoc Committee. They want me to drive a car with the three steering wheels and with so many brakes—foot brake, hand brake, and another on my neck. So I cannot do that.

I had accepted this solution with the reservation that Son Sann has no role to play in the coalition. That means with the reservation that I do not have to drive that car. That's the reason why after my withdrawal Singapore proposed a new formula, a loose coalition and in this loose coalition, we retain our identity.

There is no front and we have only a loose coalition to fight the enemy and oblige the enemy to implement the resolutions of the United Nations. After their withdrawal the loose coalition will be dissolved, to let the people inside exercise their right to self-determination, freely, with general elections under U.N. supervision.

Cohen: So you are saying that this is a fighting front but not a principled front?

Son Sann: Yes, and very loose. That is why we have accepted in principle with the only reservation that I must consult my countrymen. I have given my acceptance already in principle but the Khmer Rouge, they ask too much. They have not answered yet because now they have no benefit like Singapore.

If I now have to leave this car, I can sell it, because they [the Khmer Rouge] have not only one steering wheel, perhaps one brake, and they have no advantage in letting me drive the car. They know if the coalitions were mine, the ASEAN countries and other countries, perhaps one day America, would give aid to us, not to them. I was very reluctant to go to Singapore. Now they are very reluctant to join the new coalition.

Cohen: Do you agree that the Khmer Rouge committed large-scale genocide in Cambodia?

Son Sann: Yes, Yes! Millions! Millions! You can ask every one of us [pointing to his aides in the room]. Everyone, every Cambodian understands. You can ask everyone, they will answer you that many members of their families were killed, sometimes killed in front of their eyes.

Cohen: Do you agree that the Chinese were heavily involved in this genocide?

Son Sann: Can we go off the record?

Cohen: What are the possibilities for solution of the Cambodian situation?

Son Sann: In my understanding there are three possibilities as solutions. The first possibility: the Khmer Rouge win, and if the Khmer Rouge win, the communists in Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, will get aid from the Khmer Rouge and from whom you know [China], and there will be many difficulties in the region.

The second possibility: the enemy wins. Perhaps only one year, maybe two years in my opinion, and they will attack Thailand, and there will be a big war. So many countries will be involved because of your [the U.S.] defense treaty with Thailand.

Three: a coalition. You know that now the Soviet people control Kampuchea. Thousands are being trained in the Soviet Union, and lately in a clash we have killed three Caucasians. We don't know if they were Soviet, East German, or Cuban. We tried to retain their corpses but we could not get close. The Soviets are involved everywhere—Afghanistan, Cambodia. If the U.S. can do nothing because the people in America are afraid to see Americans involved, I think it is not right because you will be obliged to involve yourselves.

My recommendations: we need small aid, because your administration is not ready, small military aid. And if we receive weapons, light weapons, we can increase guerrilla activity. Now, we are in a hurry because all the cadre in the hamlets, the villages, the provinces, are still nationalists, but if the people trained in the Soviet Union come in, they surely are communists. They are of the new communist party, pro-Soviet, and they will change all the nationalists. So there is a time limit and it is hard for us. This is our last chance.