

By David Ashley

# Between War and Peace:

*Cambodia 1991-1998*

**T**he 1991 Paris agreements and the resulting UN intervention to implement them reduced and altered, but could not end the Cambodian conflict. To understand why, one must first comprehend the core issue which frustrated peace negotiations from 1986 until 1991 and which has continued to dog Cambodia: the inability of the factions to share state power.

## **The struggle for power, 1991-1993**

In the late 1980s, as foreign involvement waned and the nationalistic and ideological aspects of the Cambodian war receded, the principal dynamic behind the conflict became the factional scramble for power. Cambodia was a nation with no traditions of sharing power and no institutions with which to limit it: one either had absolute power to use and abuse, or one was subject to those who did. Nor does Cambodian history provide any examples of governments peacefully giving up power: the violence with which opponents were traditionally treated, taken to gross extremes under Pol Pot, perhaps suggests why. Power – and only power – brought security, as it also did wealth and patronage.

But economic and military realities meant that prospective governments could not survive without international recognition and aid. So while the forms of the struggle between the factions varied during the 1980s and 1990s – military, diplomatic and political – the aims remained unchanged: power and legitimacy.

## **An absence of common ground**

Each of the factions justified its pursuit of power, less on the needs of its followers or its plans for the future than on its past claims to legitimacy and the past crimes of others. This made it all the more difficult to find common ground between them. In particular, the aims of the two militarily strongest factions, the Cambodian People's Party (CPP) and the Khmer Rouge (officially known as the Party of Democratic Kampuchea, PDK), were diametrically opposed. The CPP hoped the peace process would legitimise the state structure arranged by the Vietnamese in 1979, known as the 'State of Cambodia' (SoC). The Khmer Rouge hoped the peace process would dismantle the SoC regime and replace it with an administration made up of all four factions, thus returning to the Khmer Rouge a share of state power and legitimacy. Both still hoped to monopolise power in the long-term.

*Troops loyal to Hun Sen evacuate a wounded colleague during fighting in Phnom Penh — 6 July, 1997*



Source: Al Rockoff

The idea, floated from the early 1980s, of holding elections to decide who should have power and legitimacy failed to break the deadlock; after all, Cambodian elections had always been won by whoever organised them. The CPP insisted that elections be held under the SoC and the Khmer Rouge insisted that elections be held under a quadripartite coalition. The CPP argued the SoC was the only bulwark against the 'return of the genocidal Pol Pot regime'. The Khmer Rouge argued that the SoC was the creation and creature of an illegal Vietnamese occupation and that, with it in power, free elections were impossible.

The position of the two smaller factions, Prince Ranariddh's FUNCINPEC and Son Sann's KPLNF, was more flexible. Although allied to the Khmer Rouge before the peace agreement on nationalist grounds, they professed to desire peace and democracy. With the weakest armies, they had a vested interest in promoting peaceful competition. Since they, unlike the 'former' communist factions, had no hope of capturing the whole state, they aimed for a share of government posts. In the eyes of the Khmer Rouge and CPP, they were corrupt opportunists and potential allies rather than serious opponents.

## The aims of the Paris agreements

The Paris agreements had two primary objectives. The first was to end international involvement in the Cambodian conflict. This was achieved by all foreign players pledging to end partisan assistance to the factions. The second aim, acknowledging that the factions were unwilling to end the struggle between them, was to transform the military conflict into a political one. All factions would give up their weapons and compete in elections, with international recognition and aid going to the winner. To get around the intractable question of who should organise the elections and run the country in the pre-election period, the agreements entrusted this responsibility to the United Nations.

It was the failure of this second objective which determined Cambodia's troubled course after 1991. In part, no accord could have brought peace in 1991 because the motor behind the peace process was international pressure rather than national reconciliation. In part, the Paris agreements, by looking to elections to decide the winner in a decade-long war, raised the electoral stakes so high that no side could agree to lose (see page 61). And in part, the unsuccessful implementation of the agreements — including the failure to disarm factional armies and to create a neutral state structure — ensured elections would not end the conflict.

**Accord between the Cambodian People's Party (CPP) and the National United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful and Cooperative Cambodia (FUNCINPEC)**

In view of effectively implementing the Agreement on a political settlement and promoting mutual trust;

In view of maintaining political stability in Cambodia and creating conditions favouring the accomplishment of His Royal Highness Samdech Norodom Sihanouk's noble mission in the service of the nation;

The Cambodian People's Party represented by H.E. Mr Hun Sen, and the National United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful and Cooperative Cambodia, represented by H.R.H. Prince Norodom Ranariddh, have agreed as follows:

**Article 1:** The two parties agree to cooperate fully in creating conditions favouring the accomplishment of H.R.H. Samdech Norodom Sihanouk's mission in service of the nation. The two parties pledge to support H.R.H. Samdech Norodom Sihanouk's candidature in the forthcoming presidential elections in Cambodia.

**Article 2:** The two parties agree to refrain from attacking each other from this day on and during the electoral campaign. The two parties pledge to make the necessary efforts to honour this commitment.

**Article 3:** The two parties agree to cooperate in the future National Assembly, and to do so regardless of the number of seats obtained by each party in the National Assembly, and to form a coalition government based on the supreme interests of the nation.

**Article 4:** The two parties agree to build on this cooperation to lay a solid basis for realising national reconciliation and contributing to social stability.

**Article 5:** This accord, which is the fruit of sincere goodwill, represents the basis for cooperation between the two political forces at the present time and in the future.

**Article 6:** Upon signature of this accord, the two parties will name their respective representatives to consult and resolve together any problems which might arise during its implementation.

Signed in Phnom Penh, 20 November 1991

In the name of FUNCINPEC, Norodom

Ranariddh

In the name of the CPP, Hun Sen

**Dilemmas of implementation**

In retrospect, it was inevitable that the UN's attempt to implement the Paris agreements would run into difficulties. The objectives of the CPP and the Khmer Rouge remained incompatible: both only signed the accord under strong international pressure and in the hope that they could twist its ambiguities to their advantage. The CPP hoped that the UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) and the Supreme National Council (SNC) – the quadripartite body set up to represent Cambodia's sovereignty and promote reconciliation – would be toothless bodies whose presence would simply legitimise the SoC structure. The Khmer Rouge hoped that a strong UNTAC and SNC would significantly weaken the SoC's control over the country. They could not both be right.

In the event, the problems arrived far sooner than UNTAC itself, which was charged with overseeing implementation of the Paris agreements and was only fully deployed in mid-1992. The agreements, signed on 23 October 1991, unleashed a rapid series of events which included a short-lived alliance between the CPP and FUNCINPEC (see box): the near-lynching of Khmer Rouge president, Khieu Samphan, by a CPP-organised mob on his arrival in Phnom Penh and the crushing of student demonstrations against SoC corruption. Meanwhile, UNTAC's arrival was delayed due to financial and bureaucratic hold-ups and the US Congress' continued to object to Khmer Rouge involvement.

From Pol Pot's perspective, an American plot was being hatched to divert the quadripartite Paris agreements into a bipartite (CPP-FUNCINPEC) accord, through which western aid would sustain the SoC structures and fund them to destroy the Khmer Rouge. Subsequent events over 1992 and 1993 – particularly UNTAC's failure to control the SoC structure and the creation of a CPP-FUNCINPEC coalition government after the elections – only confirmed Pol Pot in his analysis. Beginning in January 1992, the Khmer Rouge thus grew increasingly sceptical of the peace process: it

renounced the ceasefire, refused to disarm, ended cooperation with UNTAC, boycotted the elections and eventually launched an unsuccessful military campaign to derail the elections. But the Khmer Rouge's actions — which it justified by UNTAC's alleged refusal to implement the agreements' provisions on verifying withdrawal of Vietnamese forces and controlling the SoC structure — ironically served to make implementation harder and the CPP stronger.

First, the Khmer Rouge's renunciation of the ceasefire meant that the demobilisation of the other factions was suspended. All sides ended up retaining most of their men and weapons in the post-UNTAC era. This particularly favoured the CPP whose army was easily the largest. The continued Khmer Rouge attacks also made it easier — politically and practically — for the CPP to use violence against the 'opposition' parties as they sought to organise within SoC-controlled areas. Some 100 members of FUNCINPEC and the Buddhist Liberal Democratic Party (BLDP, the principal successor to the KPLNF) were killed in CPP-organised violence in 1992-93.

Second, given the continuing fighting, the Supreme National Council (SNC) failed to become a substantive institution or build reconciliation between the factions which — despite the gradual proliferation of alternative political parties, newspapers and non-governmental organisations — remained the key political players. This failure of reconciliation was not surprising. The factional leaders were never truly committed to burying their differences which instead were accentuated and even deepened by the process of electoral competition.

Third, the *de facto* withdrawal of the Khmer Rouge from the peace process weakened UNTAC's ability to take action against the CPP. UNTAC did not have the military capacity or international backing to compel the Khmer Rouge to abide by the agreements; the Security Council contented itself with imposing token trade sanctions. But this also meant that

UNTAC could do even less against the CPP's similarly systematic, but significantly less gross violations. Moreover, once the UN had invested its resources and credibility in Cambodia, it needed the CPP more than the other way around. With the Khmer Rouge out, UNTAC needed the remaining factions in order for there to be a peace process at all, in particular the CPP which controlled almost all of the territory on which UNTAC was deployed.

Against this background, it was impossible for the UN to implement its mandate to ensure a 'neutral political environment' for the elections. The CPP maintained its tight control of the bureaucracy, army, police, media and judiciary and used them systematically to support its electoral campaign. FUNCINPEC and the KPLNF were little different in the much smaller zones along the Thai-Cambodian border which they administered. Although aware of this, the UN lacked the margin for manoeuvre and the political backing of member countries to do much about it. The end-result was that almost nothing was done to remove key state structures from factional domination. For the same reasons, despite gathering evidence of widespread human rights abuses, UNTAC could not penetrate the wall of official impunity.

UNTAC did have major successes, particularly where it could do things itself — such as repatriating 350,000 refugees, promoting human rights awareness and organising the elections. In the longer perspective, the mere presence of 22,000 well-paid UN personnel throughout Cambodia greatly accelerated the fledgling process of economic and political liberalisation. But UNTAC's mandate, organisation and resources were designed for a peacekeeping rather than a peaceimplementation operation: where the factions refused to implement their commitments, UNTAC ultimately decided it could not force them into compliance.

### **The May 1993 elections**

The Paris agreements foresaw the elections taking place in a neutral, peaceful, free environment. By May 1993, despite admitting such an

environment did not exist, the UN insisted on holding the elections on schedule. FUNCINPEC and the BLDP, believing the CPP enjoyed a huge advantage, considered a boycott but were dissuaded by strong international pressure and the relatively peaceful and successful character of their final month of campaigning.

The gamble paid off. In a festive atmosphere, the hitherto silent Cambodian masses withstood the intimidation of both the Khmer Rouge and the CPP. Despite Khmer Rouge efforts to coerce people into joining its boycott of the elections, 89% of those registered turned out to vote. And despite the CPP's liberal use of violence and the SoC structures, it lost. Prince Ranariddh's FUNCINPEC won 58 out of 120 seats in the new assembly with pledges to return Sihanouk to power, forging peace with the Khmer Rouge and ending corruption and Vietnamese immigration. FUNCINPEC's long-time ally, the BLDP, gained 10 seats. The CPP, whose campaign focused on the need to fight the Khmer Rouge militarily and on accusations that FUNCINPEC and the BLDP were Pol Pot stooges, won 51 seats. Only one seat went to any of the 17 other parties.

Unfortunately, UNTAC's success in promoting and harnessing this overwhelming enthusiasm for democracy proved less important than its inability to bring about the institutions and environment necessary for a democratic transition. The CPP refused to accept the results and, by means of the gun, forced its way into the dominant position in a coalition government with FUNCINPEC (see box opposite).

Notwithstanding the dubious circumstances of the coalition's creation and the continuing Khmer Rouge insurgency, the international community declared the elections and UNTAC a great success. After all, a principal aim of the peace process had been an internationally recognisable government, and now there was one which not only controlled most of the country but could also claim popular legitimacy. With much relief, the international community declared the Cambodian conflict over.

## **The power-sharing experiment, 1993-1996**

### **Power-sharing as peacekeeping**

Given its origins, the coalition was never simply a political deal to gain a parliamentary majority. Rather it was the key element in an unwritten power-sharing arrangement which kept the peace between the CPP and FUNCINPEC for three years. This was evident from two of the most unusual features of the coalition:

First, the power-sharing arrangement embraced not only the cabinet but the entire state. This reflected the fact that CPP and FUNCINPEC remained factions — with their own armies, police, media and bureaucrats — rather than ordinary political parties. While the CPP-controlled institutions and personnel instantaneously became those of the Royal Government, FUNCINPEC (and to a lesser extent the BLDP) integrated large numbers of existing and newly-recruited personnel into the already bloated SoC civilian and military apparatus.

Second, the two parties were formally equal, as symbolised by having co-premiers with equal power and status. Not only the government but virtually every state body — from police commissariats to ministerial departments — had the same dual-command structure. Whether they had a head from the CPP and a deputy head from FUNCINPEC, or vice-versa, or two equal heads in the case of sensitive departments like the ministries of interior and defence, each was supposed to function on the principle of 'consensus' (i.e. all decisions were to be mutually agreed by both parties). But equality had its limits: the CPP retained a crucial advantage for it successfully defended its monopoly over the courts and sub-provincial authorities whilst the police, gendarmerie and army were all headed by CPP nominees.

This consensus-based power-sharing structure naturally gave the CPP a veto over all decisions of the new government. For the system to work at all Ranariddh had to make significant



concessions. He thus acquiesced in fighting and outlawing the Khmer Rouge, sidelining his father — who spent most of the post-election years in Beijing in poor health and spirits — and generally making no attempt to exert FUNCINPEC's parliamentary strength or implement his electoral pledges. Instead, Ranariddh concentrated on such common ground as existed with his co-premier: promoting foreign relations, economic development and their own power and wealth. For nearly three years, the two men cooperated surprisingly well on a programme of economic liberalism and political conservatism.

### The decline of the state

State power is both a means and an end in the Cambodian conflict. Without access to either state power or foreign assistance, the Khmer Rouge weakened significantly after 1993. By contrast, the CPP and FUNCINPEC, by sharing power as Cambodia opened up to international trade and investment, developed new sources of revenue independent of their former foreign patrons. Whilst the state remained reliant on foreign aid to fight the Khmer Rouge and to barely maintain Cambodia's appalling social services, the two parties grew rich on the spoils of office.

The simultaneous weakening of the state and strengthening of the parties was not restricted to finance. Instead of neutralising a 'One Party-State', power-sharing Cambodian-style created two separate 'Party-States', in effect two parallel structures of authority — one belonging to the CPP, the other to FUNCINPEC. Rather than working with their immediate counterpart from the other party, officials from the highest level down preferred to use their party clients and colleagues to conduct their business. Orders, loyalty and money flowed through these channels rather than the formal state apparatus. Hierarchical patron-client networks, a constant in Cambodian history, expanded and subsumed the state.

One result was that, instead of much-needed reform, the state continued to grow in size and weaken in effectiveness despite massive

### Gun-barrel democracy

When the CPP failed to gain its expected electoral victory, it immediately rejected the results, alleging that UNTAC had fixed them. Fearing an imminent coup, Prince Sihanouk suggested that the results be put aside in favour of a 50:50 coalition between CPP and FUNCINPEC (in line with his long-held preference for a grand coalition under his own leadership). When his son and FUNCINPEC President, Prince Ranariddh, initially refused, the CPP activated its contingency plan, threatening a secession of its heartland east of the Mekong and renewed civil war. Since neither FUNCINPEC nor UNTAC were in a position to confront the CPP militarily, and since FUNCINPEC and its allies lacked the two-thirds majority necessary to push through a new constitution, Ranariddh reluctantly accepted Sihanouk's compromise.

In return, the CPP accepted the fact (although never the validity) of the election results and the new assembly voted in a 'provisional national Government' with Ranariddh and the long-time SoC Prime Minister, Hun Sen, as co-premiers. The assembly proceeded to prepare a liberal Constitution which re-created the Kingdom of Cambodia. On 23 September 1993, Sihanouk returned to the throne after a gap of 23 years. The provisional government was renamed the Royal Government of Cambodia and the co-premier system was retained, with Ranariddh as the 'first' Prime Minister and Hun Sen as the 'second'.

The other two parties in parliament joined a government of national unity, which thus faced no formal opposition. Talks on bringing the Khmer Rouge into the government, however, floundered because the political positions of the CPP and Khmer Rouge remained irreconcilable. The war in the countryside continued.

foreign aid. Within the context of uncontrolled liberalisation and easy access to weapons, the state's weakness fostered a lawless society in which not only non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and investors, but also armed criminals and drug traffickers operated freely.

The growth of the parallel structures of authority, moreover, affected power relations within the two parties. The dual structures were ultimately answerable to the co-premiers and thus significantly bolstered their personal authority and wealth. Until early 1996 – besides suppressing their mutual opponents in the Khmer Rouge, the press and parliament – each Prime Minister used the other's support to attack opponents within his own political party.

In the case of FUNCINPEC, Ranariddh used Hun Sen's backing to act against internal critics, notably the Finance Minister Sam Rainsy and the Foreign Minister Prince Sirivudh. Sam Rainsy was sacked and later expelled from parliament for his trenchant criticisms of the co-premiers. Sirivudh resigned in sympathy with Rainsy but was arrested in December 1995 on the trumped-up charge of plotting to murder Hun Sen. Although Hun Sen accepted the King's request to exile Sirivudh, he was sentenced to 20 years and Hun Sen vehemently opposed any plan to allow him to return.

The arrest of Sirivudh, the FUNCINPEC Secretary General and the King's half-brother, was the clearest evidence yet of how Hun Sen was using Ranariddh's weakness as co-premier to undermine FUNCINPEC and humiliate the royal family. It also signalled another step in Hun Sen's inexorable rise. During his time as SoC premier from 1985 to 1993, Hun Sen had always had to compete for influence within the CPP's collective leadership. After 1993, he used Ranariddh's support to successfully expand his own scope for action. Using the phenomenal financial resources he accumulated as co-premier, Hun Sen built a formidable personal power-base. This included a 1,500-man bodyguard and a media empire embracing several radio and television stations and over 20 newspapers.

Hun Sen's rise did not go unchallenged. Anti-Hun Sen resentment within the CPP lay behind a failed coup by elements within the Interior Ministry in July 1994 and remained a thorn in his side thereafter. Chea Sim, the CPP President, and his brother-in-law, Sar Kheng, co-Minister of Interior, disapproved of Hun Sen's aggressive tendencies and his inclination to act without consultation. But while they and many others within the CPP believed that Hun Sen was unnecessarily provoking FUNCINPEC, by 1996 they no longer had the power to restrain him.

### **Collapse of the coalition, 1996-1997**

Cambodia's much-vaunted political stability foundered on two threats to the power-sharing arrangements in early 1996, one actual and one potential. The actual threat lay in the imbalance within the coalition as Hun Sen increasingly flexed his muscles vis-a-vis Ranariddh. The potential threat lay in the commune elections scheduled for 1997 (but eventually cancelled) and forthcoming parliamentary elections in 1998, which evoked the same hopes and fears as in 1993. Once again, these elections would bear the burden of deciding the winner and loser among armed adversaries in a country where there was no neutral state, a weak rule of law and where violence remained part of the political process.

Cambodia's stability was so fragile because it had not been built on a democratic process which could incorporate change and debate: indeed there had been little progress after 1993 in developing the institutions, fora and discourse essential for substantive political debate in Cambodia. Instead, stability rested on the denial of any political differences and the relationship between two all-powerful but impetuous men. When Hun Sen's provocations shattered that illusion, close cooperation turned into mortal enmity and the Cambodian conflict returned to centre stage.

### **Alliance building through 'national reconciliation'**

The period from April 1996 to July 1997 was one of ever-increasing tension. Although the coalition continued on paper, in practice the

*Hun Sen (on left) greets Ieng Sary in Pailin after his defection, November 1996*

Source: David van der Veen



state was split in two: it was a simple process for the dual structures to follow their leaders and move from coexistence to confrontation. In preparing for the inevitable showdown, whether it came in elections or on the battlefield, both parties competed for the allegiance of each and every political actor, from the most minor newspaper to the Khmer Rouge. On offer were money, positions and legal protection: any wrongdoing, from corruption to genocide, was considered subordinate to the need to build up one's party and personal networks.

Both parties used the label of 'national reconciliation' to cover their alliance building. For Ranariddh, 'national reconciliation' meant returning to the populist, anti-Vietnamese rhetoric of pre-1993 and re-embracing his former allies, including Rainsy, Son Sann and Khieu Samphan. For Hun Sen, 'national reconciliation' meant using his greater wealth and power to exploit internal differences within Ranariddh's 'National United Front' with the aim of bringing as many people over to his side as possible.

With the reduced relevance of post-1979 ideological stereotypes and the greater importance of money politics, alliance building became less predictable and more dynamic. Beginning in mid-1996, both Ranariddh and Hun Sen initiated tentative contacts with segments of the Khmer Rouge. Each offered attractive terms – continued control of armies, resources and territory; amnesties; senior military or provincial positions – beyond anything previously on the negotiating table.

This competition for its allegiance was the final straw which broke the Khmer Rouge's back (see box overleaf). In August 1996 a faction associated with Ieng Sary, Pol Pot's Deputy Prime Minister for Foreign Affairs between 1975 and 1978, broke away. In the name of 'national reconciliation' Ieng Sary was amnestied by the government, and his movement, which controlled two major strongholds, cleverly maintained its autonomy. The revolt meanwhile spread rapidly to all of the Khmer Rouge in western Cambodia and other Khmer Rouge elements ended up joining both parties.



## **The collapse of the Khmer Rouge**

The decline of the Khmer Rouge has been the greatest change in post-1991 Cambodia. As one of the last Maoist insurgencies it was ultimately doomed. Pol Pot's strategy rested on finding a way to dismantle the SoC apparatus, which never happened. Even if political opportunity had existed, the PDK was ill-equipped to exploit it. Its popular appeal was limited by memories of its period in power. The movement's structure, thinking and leadership had become outdated and inflexible. Its organisational coherence depended on a paranoid isolation of its followers from the outside world and by exposing them, even temporarily, to peace and contemporary normality, the Khmer Rouge leadership sapped the will of its fighters.

Without Chinese aid or Thai logistical support, its insurgency posed no serious threat to the Phnom Penh government. In mid-1994, lacking allies and ammunition and with morale sinking as peace and/or victory moved further away, Pol Pot sought to reinvigorate the movement with the 'class hatred' of the 'poor peasants'. He reintroduced the brutal Maoist rhetoric, discipline and tactics which the Khmer Rouge had, supposedly, renounced after the 'killing fields'. The effect was to deepen the disillusionment felt by many Khmer Rouge cadres and combatants. Defections gathered pace until the movement finally collapsed in western Cambodia.

Unsure who to blame for this disastrous decline, and who should succeed an ailing Pol Pot, the remaining leadership fought amongst itself. In June 1997, Pol Pot had his ex-defence minister, Son Sen, killed and tried to purge his veteran deputies, Nuon Chea and Ta Mok. He failed and was himself arrested, underwent a show-trial and was sentenced to life-long detention. By the time of Pol Pot's fatal heart attack on 14 May 1998, the movement itself was on the point of total collapse, with virtually no troops or territory. The vast majority had — for reasons of pragmatism, money or war-weariness — sided with their long-time enemy, Hun Sen.

In October 98, Nuon Chea, Khieu Samphan and Ta Mok, the key remaining members of the Khmer Rouge leadership, remained in the jungle — their fate uncertain.

## **The July 1997 coup**

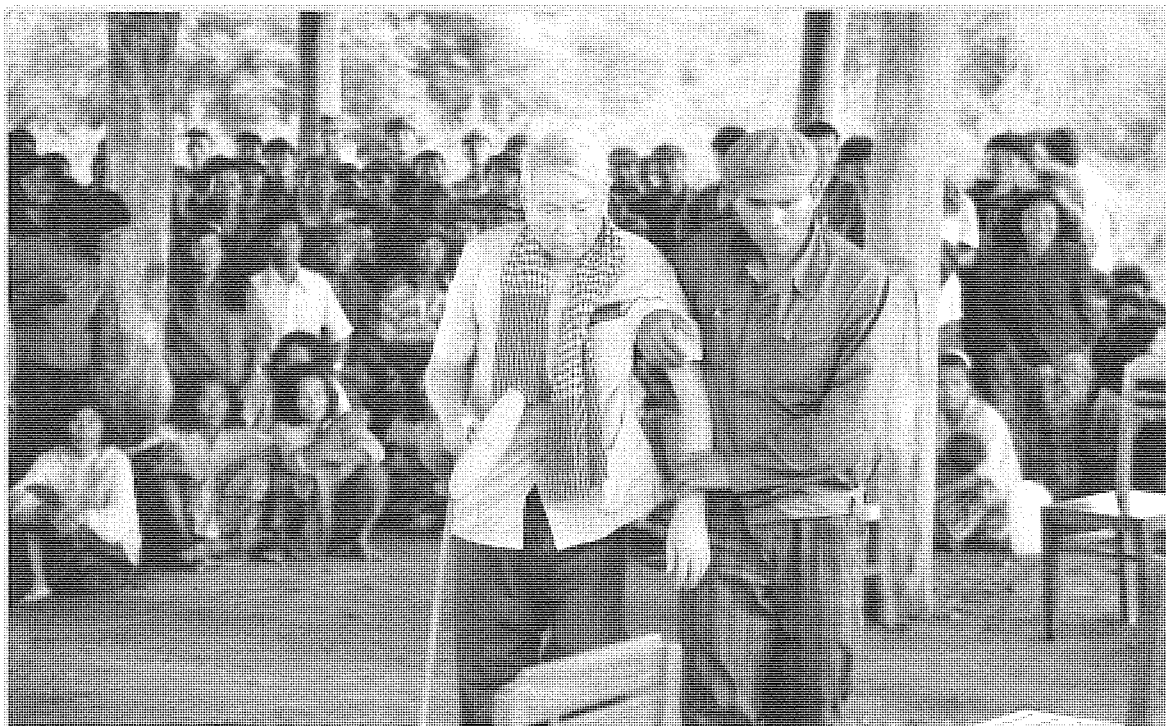
It was always likely that the stand-off between the co-premiers would end in violence. Hun Sen had already shown a willingness to revert to the threat and actuality of force. The worst single act of political violence was a March 1997 grenade attack against a Sam Rainsy-led demonstration outside the parliament, which left at least 16 people dead. According to a UN investigation, the attack was organised with the complicity of Hun Sen's bodyguard.

Any political solution — including new elections — depended on cooperation between Hun Sen and Prince Ranariddh, the absence of which was the cause of the stand-off. But the passive, disinterested attitude of the international community further contributed to the stalemate. The nations which had worked so hard to bring peace failed to capitalise on the leverage that the Paris agreements and their foreign aid gave them. All they offered were unco-ordinated and toothless appeals to the goodwill of Cambodia's leaders who, all evidence suggested, had none.

Confident that the outside world would take no action provided the façade of parliamentary democracy and coalition government was maintained, Hun Sen took action to undermine Ranariddh's position, first by fostering a revolt among FUNCINPEC members of parliament and, when that failed, by taking military action. Beginning on 2 July 1997, his forces disarmed FUNCINPEC-aligned troops first around, and then within Phnom Penh itself. The fighting in the capital, over the weekend of 5-6 July, left an estimated 100 civilians dead. The public aim of this unilateral military action was to arrest and replace Ranariddh.

The pretext centred on allegations that Ranariddh had brought thousands of Khmer Rouge soldiers into Phnom Penh in a plot to bring back Pol Pot's 'genocidal regime'. Although Ranariddh had indeed been negotiating with the Khmer Rouge remnants immediately before the coup, Hun Sen's allegations were baseless: no hardline Khmer Rouge were

*Pol Pot is assisted on leaving a 'People's Tribunal' in Anlong Veng after a public denunciation by former Khmer Rouge subordinates – 25 July, 1997*



Source: Nate Thayer

found among FUNCINPEC's forces in Phnom Penh and former Khmer Rouge from western Cambodia were by then at least as prominent among Hun Sen's forces as they were in Ranariddh's.

#### **Post-coup, pre-election**

Having gained power, Hun Sen still needed to secure legitimacy. Instead of suppressing all opposition, Hun Sen chose his targets carefully: his real aim, besides dismissing Ranariddh, was to demolish FUNCINPEC's parallel military and bureaucratic structures while retaining the façade of the coalition. In the immediate aftermath of the coup, senior figures in the FUNCINPEC military and police were captured and executed. The remaining FUNCINPEC forces proved no match for the larger and better-equipped CPP forces.

Hun Sen moved equally quickly to consolidate his political authority. Using the two-thirds majority in parliament which he now obtained through the co-option and intimidation of several FUNCINPEC MPs, Hun Sen had Ranariddh replaced as first Prime Minister by the politically malleable Foreign Minister, Ung Huot. This effectively meant that the FUNC-

INPEC structure came under Hun Sen's control. Hun Sen also used his new parliamentary majority to cement his control over the judiciary: the two highest constitutional bodies, the Supreme Council of the Magistracy and the Constitutional Council, were both formed with clear CPP majorities (as was the National Election Committee the body responsible for organising the 1998 parliamentary election).

Although the international response to Hun Sen's actions was muted, he did suffer two major diplomatic setbacks: ASEAN suspended Cambodia's entry and the country's UN seat was left vacant, at Washington's insistence. Equally important, Cambodia's economy was simultaneously hit by the flight of investors after the fighting, the suspension of aid by the US, Germany, IMF and World Bank, and the regional financial meltdown. For both political and economic reasons, therefore, Hun Sen intensified his close ties with China. He also sought to ensure that preparations for parliamentary elections were sufficiently credible for the international community to bankroll the process and recognise the results. Once again, the focus of the Cambodian conflict shifted temporarily from the bullet to the ballot. ■