

ORF OCCASIONAL PAPER #20

JANUARY 2011



Japan's Role in the Cambodian Peace Settlement (1977-1993)

K.V. Kesavan

OBSERVER RESEARCH FOUNDATION

Japan's Role in the Cambodian Peace Settlement (1977-1993)

K.V. Kesavan

**OBSERVER RESEARCH FOUNDATION
NEW DELHI**

About the Author

A leading Indian scholar in the field of Japanese Studies, K.V. Kesavan is currently a distinguished fellow at Observer Research Foundation, New Delhi. He is head of the Japanese Studies programme at ORF. He was Professor of Japanese Studies at the Centre for East Asian Studies, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, for over 30 years. Author of several books on Japan, he has also written numerous research papers in Indian and foreign academic journals on Japan's foreign policy and domestic politics. He has been a Visiting Professor/Fellow at many universities in Japan and the US. In 2001, he received the Japanese Foreign Minister's Commendation Award for his contribution to closer understanding between India and Japan.

Japan's Role in the Cambodian Peace Settlement (1977-1993)

The importance of Japan's role in Cambodia's peace settlement lies in the fact that it was one of the earliest political tasks Tokyo undertook in a region which had been known for its antipathy to Japan arising from the trauma of the Second World War. Southeast Asia posed one of the most serious challenges to Japan's post-war diplomacy, as it had to wrestle not only with the bitter legacies of the war, but also with the rigours of Cold War rivalry. In addition to the US-Soviet rivalry, the Sino-Soviet confrontation exerted strong negative influences, particularly on Vietnam and Cambodia. To be sure, by 1978 when Vietnam invaded and occupied Cambodia, Japan had already settled the tortuous reparations issues and normalized its diplomatic relations with most of the Southeast Asian countries.

Indochina was a low priority area in Japan's Southeast Asia policy after 1952. When in 1959 Japan established diplomatic relations with South Vietnam, it did so under considerable political compulsions. But this did not prevent Tokyo from maintaining nominal economic links with North Vietnam too. During the Vietnam War years, Japan's diplomacy was put to severe test as it had to extend support to the US cause in the face of severe domestic resistance. After the end of the war, Japan lost no time in recognizing the unified Vietnam in 1975 and started forging economic links with Hanoi.

The Fukuda Doctrine: This positive approach received further stimulus in 1977 when Japanese Prime Minister Fukuda Takeo enunciated a new policy for the region. Known as the Fukuda Doctrine, it emphasized the

following principles: Japan would never again play a military role in the region; Japan would maintain close, heart-to-heart understanding with ASEAN countries; this close relationship with the ASEAN would not be inconsistent with fostering mutual cooperation with Vietnam and other Indochinese countries.¹ Economic relations between Japan and Vietnam began to develop, but Tokyo and ASEAN had certain shared concerns about Vietnam's possible dominance in the Indochina peninsula. These concerns were clearly visible when Vietnamese Foreign Minister Nguyen Duy Trinh paid a visit to Tokyo in December 1978. Trinh had undertaken the visit to assure his Japanese hosts that Vietnam's treaty of friendship with the Soviet Union signed in September, 1978 would in no way deprive his country of its freedom to pursue an independent policy in its relations with Japan. Trinh's other objective was to obtain substantial Japanese economic assistance for Vietnam. His expectations were partially fulfilled in the sense that Japan agreed to extend 10 billion yen grant in aid. But Tokyo took care to clarify that its aid commitment would be governed by the condition that Hanoi would continue to pursue "an independent line" in its foreign policy.²

Vietnam's military intervention in Cambodia: Japan's apprehensions proved well founded when Vietnam's forces occupied Cambodia in December 1978. The installation of the pro-Soviet Heng Samrin regime in Cambodia alarmed Japan and it had to quickly make up its mind whether it should recognise the new regime in Phnom Penh. A brief consideration of what followed the Cambodian scene soon after the invasion would be relevant to Japan's approach to the issue. The new pro-Vietnamese government installed under the leadership of Heng Samrin and Hun Sen was known as the People's Republic of Cambodia, which came to be rechristened as the State of Cambodia after 1989. Though the Phnom Penh Government controlled nearly 80% of the Cambodian territories, it did not enjoy the support of important countries outside the

Socialist bloc. In addition, the three major factions that opposed the Heng Samrin administration launched a resistance movement. The first group known as FUNCINPEC (Front Uni National pour un Cambodge Independent, Neutre, Pacifique, et Cooperatif) was led by Prince Norodom Sihanouk. Despite Sihanouk's charisma, his faction controlled a very small area of the country and possessed only 10,000 troops. Another group known as Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPLNF) comprised conservative elements and had only 5,000 combatants. But by far the strongest group with 30,000 troops at its command was the Khmer Rouge, led by Khieu Samphan. This group was infamous for its mindless violence when it was in power before the Vietnamese invasion. Associated with Pol Pot, it raised images of fear and terror. Despite the differences in their political orientations and strategies, the three groups founded a resistance government called Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK).³ Divergent countries like the US, China, ASEAN and Japan extended their support to the coalition largely based on what they perceived to be their own national interests. The US supported it because of its ideological resistance to the global Communist movement. China's support was governed by its differences with the Soviet Union, which was a close ally of Vietnam. The ASEAN Group felt that the Vietnamese invasion was a threat to the evolution of regional cooperation and unity. How did Japan respond to it?

Japan's response: Expressing his intention not to recognize the new regime in Phnom Penh, Japanese Foreign Minister Sonoda Sunao said in January 1979 that Tokyo would strive for a peaceful settlement of the Cambodian issue in consultation with ASEAN countries.⁴ Simultaneously, he also instructed the Japanese ambassadors in the ASEAN capitals to confer closely with the governments concerned.⁵ The Japanese Government was carefully monitoring the diplomatic

moves that the ASEAN foreign ministers were contemplating at their meeting at Bangkok on January 12-13, 1979. In their joint statement, they “strongly deplored” Vietnam's military intervention against the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Cambodia. Sensing a deep bond of solidarity among the ASEAN countries, Japan from then on tended to extend its full support to them. By the end of January 1979, Japan's position on the Cambodian issue had become somewhat clear, though it had still not taken a final decision on economic aid that it had promised to extend to Vietnam in December 1978. Foreign Minister Sonoda Sunao, in his policy speech delivered at the Japanese Diet on January 25, 1979, expressed his deep regrets at the developments in Cambodia and hoped that peace and stability would be restored in the region in accordance with the principles of non-interference and self-determination. Nevertheless, he was equally appreciative of the need for developing a sense of “mutual understanding” with Indochinese countries.⁶

As the Cambodian issue grew more serious, Japan's position became far more complex as it faced conflicting diplomatic pressures from China and the Soviet Union. One should remember that ever since Japan signed a peace treaty with the People's Republic of China in August 1978, its relations with the two communist countries had witnessed a major change. Further, though both Japan and China were opposed to the Vietnamese intervention in Cambodia, their interests and objectives did not always converge. For instance, when in February 1979, Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping met Japan's Prime Minister Ohira Masayoshi and Sonoda in Tokyo, he hinted at a possible Chinese military action against Vietnam. Deng stated that the Cambodian question “does not stop being a bilateral matter between Vietnam and China, but it concerns the peace of the Asia-Pacific region and the whole world.”⁷ But his Japanese hosts did not agree with his assessment and expressed the hope that China

would not resort to any military action.⁸ When China initiated military action against Vietnam on February 20, Japan was understandably shocked, and its reaction was on expected lines. It called upon both China and Vietnam to immediately announce a cease-fire and withdraw their military forces from both Vietnam and Cambodia, respectively. Simultaneously, it also urged Moscow to respond to these developments with restraint. But the failure of Tokyo to criticize the Chinese action aroused considerable disappointment in the official circles in Moscow, which contended that the peace treaty between China and Japan had encouraged Beijing to put its 'chauvinistic designs' against Vietnam into action. On March 6, Moscow issued a note of protest, accusing Japan of approving China's "hegemonism and expansionism". It also complained that Japan had failed to distinguish between "aggressor and victim" in the border dispute.⁹

Sino-Soviet Recrimination: The complexity of the issue forced Japan to steer a cautious course that would not involve it in the deepening Sino-Soviet recrimination. When Prime Minister Ohira visited Beijing in December 1979, he informed Chinese leaders that Japan would carry out the economic aid it had pledged to Vietnam. He stated, "Japan has its own way of looking at Vietnam and its own position."¹⁰

Japan's stance: Japan's stand on the Cambodian issue hardened following Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in December 1979. Supporting the US policy in Afghanistan, Japan joined Allied countries in enforcing an embargo on trade with Moscow. Relations with Moscow deteriorated so sharply that the Japanese Government openly identified the Soviet Union as the country posing a 'potential' threat to Japan.¹¹ It was therefore natural that Japan's stand on the Cambodian question could not be insulated from its general views on the Soviet Union. From then on, Japan spoke loudly on the issue at two levels. First, through

several joint statements it signed with other nations, Japan emphasized the need to establish stability and peace in Indochina. Second, Japan moved closer to ASEAN position on the issue and extended strong support to it in global forums like the UN and the international conference on Cambodia.

Japan's participation in the discussions held at the UN during the initial period after Vietnam's intervention in Cambodia needs to be noted. As early as in January 1979 the UN Security Council considered a resolution seeking the withdrawal of the Vietnamese forces from Cambodia, but it was thwarted by a Soviet veto. Participating in the discussion, Japanese ambassador to the UN, Abe Isao articulated Japan's position and argued, "Given the circumstances in which the situation in Kampuchea has developed, one has to conclude that it is clearly one in which forces are deeply involved. Japan strongly deplores such foreign involvement and takes the position that all foreign forces should be immediately and totally withdrawn from the Cambodian territory."¹² As the discussions did not produce any results, a Security Council meeting was reconvened in February, 1979. Japan joined the ASEAN countries in appealing to the Secretary General to that effect. In the ensuing session, Japan supported ASEAN's position that both Vietnam and China should refrain from armed conflict. But the Council could not take any effective measure as the draft resolution seeking the immediate cessation of hostilities and the total withdrawal of all external troops was twice rejected. Expressing regret, the Japanese representative at the Council said: "The veto of one of its permanent members prevented the Security Council from dealing quickly and effectively with the urgent situation. My delegation finds it deplorable that the Security Council, a body whose primary responsibility is the maintenance of international peace and security, has not been able to deal in an appropriate manner with a situation that constitutes an immediate threat to the peace and security."¹³ When in 1980

the ASEAN countries introduced a resolution in the General Assembly calling for the convening of an international conference on the Cambodian question, Japan extended its support and made efforts both within and outside the UN to garner support for the resolution. It argued that the aims of such a conference should be to ensure: a) the withdrawal of foreign forces from Cambodia; b) the establishment of a government truly representing the different sections of the Cambodian population and; c) the creation of a Cambodia that posed no threat to its neighbours.¹⁴

Japan urged that the contemplated conference should ensure the participation of as many countries as possible, especially the non-aligned countries. Anxious to avoid the impression that it was meant only to condemn Hanoi, it proposed that the conference be kept open to Vietnam and the Soviet Union. It further emphasized that the conference should strive to present a scenario for the peaceful settlement of the Cambodian issue in a manner that Vietnam regarded worthy of consideration.¹⁵ Ultimately, the conference was convened in New York in July 1981, but due to the non-participation of Vietnam and the Soviet Union, it failed to arouse any expectations and achieved nothing. At best, the conference served only to underline the solidarity of the ASEAN countries on the question.

Change in the strategic environment: Until the closing years of the 1980s, Japan by and large considered ASEAN as a guiding force for its policy on Cambodia. But soon, many global changes started exerting a powerful influence on Asian countries, almost driving them to undertake policy changes on several crucial issues. With the advent of Mikhail Gorbachev, Soviet policy on several key issues including Cambodia underwent sweeping changes. Moscow started to become very keen on withdrawing from regional conflicts and to work for better relations with China. Gorbachev's subsequent efforts were directed towards

removing the 'obstacles' that stood in the way of its relations with China. First, he tried to ease the situation along the border by withdrawing Soviet forces. Simultaneously, several official talks at different levels were held between the two countries to work out the details of a broad rapprochement. All these were capped by a summit between the top leaders held in Beijing in May 1989.¹⁶ Moscow's aid stoppage to Vietnam in 1989 had the clinching effect on Hanoi to withdraw its military forces from Cambodia. Almost simultaneously, following the suppression of the pro-democracy movement in China in the Tiananmen incident of June 1989, Chinese policy in Indochina also started undergoing major changes. Facing economic sanctions from the major industrialized powers of the world, Beijing needed time to regain its earlier status in the comity of nations including the Asian continent. Beijing's support to the Khmer Rouge faction in Cambodia could no longer be taken for granted and in the following years, China was making serious efforts to build new bridges of understanding with Vietnam itself.

Japan's independent initiatives: Indeed, after 1988, Japan itself showed clear signals of taking its own initiatives on the Cambodian issue and not merely conforming to the ASEAN position. One reason for this change was that among the ASEAN countries themselves one could discern certain differences. For instance, while Thailand and Singapore took a soft stance towards Vietnam, Malaysia and Indonesia were considered hardliners. For eight years prior to the advent of Chatichai Choonhavan as Prime Minister, Thailand had pursued a policy of confrontation with Vietnam. From 1988 onwards, Thailand began to give up its trade ban policy to move towards expanding economic relations with Hanoi. In fact, Prime Minister Chatichai initiated a new policy of converting Indochina from “a battlefield into a trading market”, with immense benefits accruing to Thailand. In January 1989, he invited Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen to Thailand as a friend,¹⁷ thus departing from the

ASEAN policy of isolating the Phnom Penh Government. To allay the considerable misgivings both in the ASEAN and China, Chatichai quickly undertook a trip to Beijing and met all three Cambodian coalition leaders, Norodom Sihanouk, Son Sann and Kieu Samphan. But the real cause for Chatichai's shift in his Cambodian policy was to gain access to the natural resources of Indochina and to expand its own trade links, particularly with Vietnam.

Though every Japanese prime minister after Fukuda made customary visits to Southeast Asia, Prime Minister Takeshita Noboro used his visit in May 1989 to articulate Japan's policy on the Cambodian issue. He started his tour with Thailand and put forward a four-point formula for ending the prevailing deadlock in the Cambodian situation. Recognizing Norodom Sihanouk as the key leader, the formula called for a complete withdrawal of the Vietnamese troops from Cambodia, the establishment of an international mechanism to monitor the troops pull-out, preventing the Khmer Rouge from capturing power and holding of general elections under the leadership of Sihanouk. He made this statement on May 1, in Bangkok since he attached great geo-political significance to Thailand's role in the Cambodian crisis, as it shared common borders with Cambodia and Laos.¹⁸

In the early part of July, 1989, Japan's Foreign Minister Mitsuzuka Hiroshi participated in the expanded meeting of ASEAN Foreign Ministers and their counterparts from developed countries to give further expression to Japan's views on the steps to be taken to accomplish peace in Cambodia. Since the total withdrawal of the Vietnamese forces would need to be verified by an effective international control mechanism, he pleaded that it would be essential to make full use of the experience and expertise of the UN in this sphere. In a meeting with Thai Foreign Minister Siddhi Savetsila on July 5, Mitsuzuka renewed Japan's

pledge that it would do its utmost through both financial and personnel assistance to help settle the eleven-year-old Cambodian conflict.¹⁹ At the end of the expanded foreign ministers meeting, which was dominated by the Cambodian issue, a joint communiqué was issued which called for the total withdrawal of Vietnam's military forces and for a national reconciliation among the four Cambodian groups.

Tokyo Conference, June 1990 and Japan's role: Japan's supreme moment at peacemaking occurred in the first week of June 1990 when it succeeded in convening the Cambodian peace conference in Tokyo. Before examining the outcome of the Tokyo Conference, it is important to have a brief look at certain developments that preceded the conference. It has been noted how Thailand had changed its attitude towards Vietnam and the Phnom Penh government and started promoting economic relations with it. Prime Minister Chatichai soon went on to explore the prospects of initiating some political steps to bring about a peace settlement in Cambodia. When on April 7, 1990 Japanese Prime Minister Kaifu Toshiki, during his visit to Bangkok, proposed a summit meeting in Tokyo between Prince Sihanouk and Prime Minister Hun Sen, the Thai leader gave full support to the idea. The fact that there had been no progress in the resolution of the Cambodian issue since the first Paris Conference in July-August 1989, constituted one strong reason for Thailand's support. Chatichai believed that once peace was restored to Indochina, Japan would start playing a critical economic role. Chatichai assured Kaifu that Thailand would do everything to make such a conference a success. One of the major objectives of the conference was to prepare the groundwork for a smooth political settlement following the withdrawal of the Vietnamese forces from Cambodia in late 1989 and the failure of the third Jakarta Informal Meeting (JIM). Considering the main outcome which flowed from it, the Tokyo conference should be regarded as a turning point in the whole process of negotiations. In the past, peace

talks were conducted by the four Cambodian factions as equal parties. In the two parallel sets of talks—Hun Sen and Sihanouk talks and the JIM (Jakarta Informal Meeting) talks—the four Cambodian factions participated on an equal footing in accordance with 'one plus three' formula. But the Tokyo Conference departed from this and changed the negotiation format. The transformation of the format from 'one plus three' to 'one plus one' clearly recognized the new unfolding equations among the participating factions. Although Japan extended diplomatic recognition to the National Government of Cambodia (Sihanouk's anti-Vietnam coalition), it was fully aware of the ground reality that nearly 90% of Cambodia was under the effective control of the Heng Samrin regime. By adopting the new one plus one formula, Japan treated the three anti-Phnom Penh groups—Sihanouk, Son Sann and Khieu Samphan—as one entity with Sihanouk as their leader. In fact, the joint communiqué at the end of the conference was signed by the delegation of Norodom Sihanouk and the delegation of Hun Sen. Though Khieu Samphan came to Tokyo, he stayed away from the conference as he did not accept the one plus one formula. The sudden change in the format of the negotiations did cause great disappointment to the Khmer Rouge faction.²⁰ In an effort to bring the faction to the conference table, Japan requested China to persuade the Khmer Rouge to cooperate with the conference. But, despite the efforts made by China, Khmer Rouge did not show any signs of relenting. Even China's willingness to persuade Khieu Samphan came as a surprise, given Beijing's earlier strong support to that faction. This change in China's policy probably indicated, as Ikeda Tadashi, a Japanese diplomat involved in Cambodian negotiations, explains: Beijing was inclined to passively accept the facts as “determined by Prince Sihanouk and related countries.”²¹

More than in Beijing, one could see a sea change in Hanoi's attitude towards Japan after the conference. From the beginning, Hanoi had

always suspected Japan's involvement in the Cambodian peace process. But the absence of Khmer Rouge faction in the conference brought considerable relief to Hanoi which openly expressed its “gratitude to Japan for its contributions at the Tokyo Conference” and was prepared to “have Japan's advice” on any proposals for the Cambodian peace.²²

The main points stressed by the joint communiqué of the conference could be summarized as follows;

1. Urgent need for implementing a voluntary self-restraint on the use of force by all factions;
2. Actual cease-fire must be implemented as a step towards an acceptable solution. Such an undertaking could be realized through a cessation of hostilities and an agreement on the creation of a Supreme National Council (SNC).
3. It was essential for all factions to refrain from all activities including military operations during the transitional period;
4. The Paris Conference should take all measures necessary to monitor, supervise and ensure the withdrawal of all foreign forces;
5. The creation of SNC to ensure Cambodian neutrality, national security and national unity. The SNC should be composed of equal number of prominent personalities from both parties to represent all shades of opinion among the people of Cambodia²³.

As noted earlier, the change of format from 'one plus three' to 'one plus one' amounted to extending legitimacy to the Phnom Penh regime as it controlled almost ninety per cent of the Cambodian territory. By recognizing the prevailing geo-political realities, the Cambodian conflict tended to move in the direction of a realistic settlement based on the dynamics of global politics. The Tokyo Conference's recommendation on the Supreme National Council (SNC) was rejected by the Khmer Rouge. It also wanted the dismantling of the State of Cambodia (SOC)

regime under Heng Samrin. But the most critical outcome of the conference was the rejection of Khmer Rouge's position. From then on, as Prof. Takeda Yasuhiro of the National Defense Academy of Japan states, both Sihanouk and Son Sann tended to move closer to Phnom Penh and that “the balance among the four Cambodian factions began to shift from the coalition of the anti-Vietnamese factions to the coalition of the three factions excluding the Khmer Rouge.”²⁴

This change in Japan's Cambodian policy did not occur suddenly; one has to study it against Japan's overall objective to initiate a new thrust of assertiveness in its Asian diplomacy. The end of the Cold War and the outbreak of the Gulf War (1990-91), created an embarrassing situation for Tokyo, which drove the Japanese foreign policy establishment to adopt a more assertive stance, particularly in Asian affairs. This was clearly noticeable in Japanese Prime Minister Kaifu Toshiki's speech, delivered in Singapore in May 1991, expressing Japan's keenness to assume a more active role for a solution to the Cambodian problem. Kaifu proposed that an international conference be held in Tokyo for the reconstruction of Cambodia once a peace agreement was signed.²⁵ Foreign Minister Nakayama Taro proposed a political/security dialogue with ASEAN countries in July 1991.²⁶

As early as in February 1990, the Japanese Government sent Kono Masaharu, Director of Southeast Asia Division in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Phnom Penh on an inspection trip and the report he submitted on his return carried great significance to the future course of Japan's Cambodian policy. That Japan did not have diplomatic relations with Phnom Penh made his trip all the more significant. The salient aspects of his report were: a) the Phnom Penh regime was far more independent of Vietnam's pressures than was perceived by the people; b) Hun Sen Government controlled most of the Cambodian territory and; c) the

antipathy of the Cambodian people to the Khmer Rouge was stronger than expected.²⁷ This report had a great impact on the Japanese Government, which thought it necessary to: (a) adopt a more neutral stand in the dispute. (b) support the formation of a two party administrative body called the Supreme National Council (SNC) and; (c) adopt a tough attitude towards the Khmer Rouge.²⁸

Paris Peace Process: Before we examine Japan's deeper involvement in the Cambodian peace settlement, it would be necessary to note briefly the broad directions that the Paris Peace process took from 1989 onwards. The Paris Peace Conference was held during July-August 1989 at the initiative of France and Indonesia. Its participants included the four Cambodian factions, nineteen countries including the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, ASEAN, Japan, and the representatives of the non-aligned group. Japan and Australia were asked to co-chair the Third Committee of the conference concerned with economic reconstruction and refugees. The Committee produced useful plans for the reconstruction work. Though the impending end of the Cold War did create a certain degree of favourable environment for negotiations, the conference failed to achieve any breakthrough on how the four warring factions would share power, the role of the SNC, and the participation of the Khmer Rouge in the peace process.²⁹

Following the failure of the initial peace effort, the focus shifted to the five permanent members of the UNSC as well as Australia, Japan, and Indonesia for resuming the talks. A series of talks by the P-5 countries held in New York and Paris culminated in an agreement on a framework for a comprehensive political settlement of the Cambodian conflict in August 1990. The framework touched on the following main areas: a) administration of Cambodia during the transitional, pre-election period; b) military arrangements during the transitional period; c) elections

under the UN auspices; d) human rights issue and; e) international guarantees.³⁰

The framework provided for the establishment of a Supreme National Council (SNC) that would, as the legitimate source of authority, represent national sovereignty and unity. The Cambodian factions themselves would decide the composition of the SNC. Representing Cambodia externally, the SNC would also occupy the seat of Cambodia at the UN. As for the military arrangements during the transitional period, the framework provided for the formation of the UN Transitional Administration in Cambodia (UNTAC) with both military and civilian components. The framework called upon all parties to exercise maximum self-restraint in order to ensure ceasefire. Once the ceasefire was ensured, UNTAC would verify the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Cambodia, monitor the cessation of external military assistance and undertake the task of clearing the mines. National self-determination would be assessed through free and fair election. The final rounds of talks on the peace settlement were held during the summer of 1991 and agreements on a Comprehensive Political Settlement of the Cambodian Conflict were signed in October 1991.³¹

Japan's Role after the Paris Peace Agreement: It has already been seen how Japan took a major diplomatic initiative to hold an important conference of the four Cambodian factions in Tokyo in June 1990. By changing the negotiations format from 'one plus three' to 'one plus one', it paved the way for recognizing the Phnom Penh regime as a key participant. Second, it also stressed the importance of dividing the membership of the SNC between the two major parties involved in the dispute. That is to say that one half of SNC membership was distributed to three factions led by Sihanouk, Son Sann and the Khmer Rouge and the other half was vested with the Hun Sen regime. Japan once again

found an opportunity to play a useful role when, following the P5 Framework agreement in August 1990, the Phnom Penh regime hardly believed that the Khmer Rouge could be relied upon to respect the provisions of disarmament. It was certain that the Khmer Rouge, far from disarming itself, would wait for a suitable opportunity to unleash fresh violence to regain its position. Japan used this opportunity to chalk out its own formula and with the help of Sihanouk arranged a meeting of the three factions in Beijing in March 1991 to discuss its proposal. According to the Japanese proposal, a UN vigilance mechanism could be put in place to efficiently verify the disarmament of the three factions. It also proposed the creation of a special committee composed of representatives of the different Cambodian factions, the UNTAC and the UNHCR to probe the human rights record of the Khmer Rouge rule during 1975-79.³² The modifications suggested by Japan were opposed by the US, which believed that any change in the P-5 Plan would confuse the situation. But in August 1991, all four Cambodian factions agreed to accept a new plan based on Japan's proposal.³³

The fact that Japan maintained cordial relations with two of the principal factions-Sihanouk and Hun Sen-enabled it to be a reliable interlocutor in the whole dispute. When Hun Sen went to Tokyo on a private visit in April 1991, Japanese leaders and officials advised him to soften his opposition to the UN peace plan. They even told him that if he persisted in opposing the peace plan, he could be held responsible for scuttling the whole process.³⁴ Prime Minister Kaifu and Foreign Minister Nakayama visited Southeast Asian countries to speed up the Cambodian peace process. Nakayama's visit to Vietnam in June 1991 was particularly significant because of Hanoi's involvement in the Cambodian tangle. He and his Vietnamese counterpart Nguyen Co Thac came to an agreement on June 11, to cooperate in finding a comprehensive solution to the issue³⁵.

Intransigence of the Khmer Rouge and Japan-Thailand joint efforts:

When UNTAC went on to implement various measures of disarmament during the second phase of the ceasefire that started on June 13, 1991, the Khmer Rouge refused to disarm its forces and also did not allow UNTAC forces to carry out their deployment in areas under the Khmer Rouge control. It is useful to note that the first Ministerial Conference on the Rehabilitation and Reconstruction of Cambodia took place in Tokyo on June 22, 1992 and it was very doubtful if the Khmer Rouge would participate in the conference, given its rigid stand on disarmament and demobilization. But a last minute push by Thailand, brought it to the conference table. As was expected, the conference adopted a resolution on the peace process and urged the Khmer Rouge to enter phase II of the ceasefire without any more delay.

Between the summer and fall of 1992, Japan and Thailand held a series of talks with the Khmer Rouge to work out a compromise. One important reason for Japan's initiative was to create a safe environment in Cambodia before the dispatch of Japanese personnel under UNTAC. Japan preferred to work with Thailand because Bangkok had a strong influence on the Khmer Rouge faction. Further, it is also necessary to note that China did not enjoy the same clout with the Khmer Rouge as before. In fact, when Japan appealed to Beijing that it participate in their negotiations along with Thailand, it declined to do so. Japan believed that any compromise with the Khmer Rouge should be within the framework of the Paris Peace accord. Four rounds of negotiations with Khmer Rouge during July–October 1992 convinced both Japan and Thailand that the Cambodian faction was not serious about a settlement. Khmer Rouge's proposals on disarmament and the role of the SNC went beyond the terms of the Paris Peace agreement. Japan and Thailand thereupon informed the UN Secretary General that their talks had failed to produce a solution.³⁶ This failure revealed the ground reality to the international

community. The intransigence of the Khmer Rouge intensified the belief that the faction was not at all sincere about adhering to any peace formula. More and more countries came to believe that it was now necessary to implement the Paris agreements even without the participation of the Khmer Rouge. Having failed in its talks with Khieu Samphan, Japan now turned its attention to its participation in the historic, first UN peace-keeping mission in Cambodia in 1992.

Japan's peace-keeping role and UNTAC: One of the biggest and most expensive peace-keeping operations under the world body, the UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) came into force on November 1991 and lasted until July 1993. It was carried out with the participation of several member states. Japan's deep involvement in the process sharpened its interest in seeking a more tangible peace-keeping role under the UN umbrella. The Gulf War of 1990-91 had taught Tokyo a lesson that mere financial assistance was no substitute for a tangible physical presence in any conflict situation. The long drawn legislative bill on Japan's peace-keeping operations was basically aimed at strengthening US belief that Japan would not shirk its global responsibilities. At the same time, Japan was also very keen to gain some political space in Southeast Asia, where its economic assistance had been substantial. But to gain political influence in that region called for delicate handling, as the dark memories of the Second World War continued to linger on. UNTAC provided a unique opportunity for Japan to go beyond the usual practice of merely offering development assistance. Following the passing of a peace-keeping legislation in the Japanese Diet in June 1992, Japan sent military personnel along with civilian personnel to Cambodia. The appointment of Akashi Yasushi, a serving UN official, as the head of UNTAC in July 1992 further stimulated Japan's interest in the Cambodian political process. There was a strong belief at that time that Japan's role in the peace-keeping mission in Cambodia would not have succeeded without Akashi as the UNTAC's chief administrator.

The Japanese contingent dispatched for operations under UNTAC participated in four areas of activity—monitoring ceasefire, civilian policing, election monitoring and assistance in logistics such as carrying out repairs to roads and bridges. They were governed strictly by the criteria laid down by the International Peace Cooperation Law passed by the Japanese Diet in 1992. Their functions in Cambodia depended on the fulfillment of the following conditions;

1. A cease-fire among parties in dispute
2. The consent of those parties to Japan's participation
3. A prior UN request for Japanese deployment
4. The impartiality of UN peace-keeping operations
5. The right of Japan to suspend its operations
6. Permission to use light arms for self-defence³⁷

Japan's contingents to Cambodia came under the following five categories;

a. Ceasefire Observers: Sixteen Self-defence Forces personnel were dispatched to UNTAC as ceasefire personnel in two different contingents during 1992-93. They worked in concert with peace-keepers from other countries. They monitored the ceasefire and supervised encampments storing weapons collected from disarmed Cambodian soldiers of all factions

b. Electoral Observers: Forty one personnel drawn from the Central and local government offices (18) and private sector (23) were sent to UNTAC in May 1993 to monitor and assist the National Assembly election which was to enact the Cambodian constitution.

c. Civilian Police: Seventy five civilian police officers were sent to UNTAC from October 1992 to July 1993. They were assigned to provincial and local police stations where they monitored police

activities to ensure impartiality and neutrality. They offered training to the Cambodian police.

SDF Engineering Units: Japan dispatched two 600-member engineering contingents of Japanese SDF to Cambodia. The first contingent stayed in Cambodia during September 1992-April 1993 and the second during March-September 1993. They performed a wide range of activities including reconstruction of roads and bridges that were damaged during the civil war.³⁸

Japan's peace-keeping mission and criticism at home: While the role Japan was playing was highly appreciated by Sihanouk, Hun Sen and Son Sann, in Japan itself, public opinion was highly divided. When in April-May 1993 two Japanese PKO members were killed in Cambodia, public criticism reached a high pitch and there were demands for the immediate withdrawal of all PKO contingents. Many in Japan argued that the prevailing violence in Cambodia did not conform to the criteria laid down by the International Peace Cooperation Law. The force of their argument rested on the unwillingness of one of the parties-Khmer Rouge-to enter the second phase of the disarmament and demobilization scheme. There were reports of violent clashes between the Khmer Rouge guerrillas and the Phnom Penh Government forces. The Paris peace agreements clearly laid down that the parties involved in the dispute should demobilize 70% of their troops. The possession of weapons by one major party in the dispute, many complained, endangered the lives of the personnel attached to UNTAC. It was reported that even Koizumi Junichiro, Minister of Post and Telecommunication, doubted whether the five criteria for Japan's participation in UNTAC were being adhered to.³⁹

However, Foreign Minister Muto Kabun strongly rejected any call for Japan's withdrawal and said: "In taking part in UN peace-keeping

operations, one has to stick to a kind of idealism. Every country is making efforts to realize a peaceful Cambodia. Japan too has to join these efforts within the framework of what the country can offer".⁴⁰ In a bid to soften criticism at home, Japanese Home Minister Murata Kenjiro paid a visit to Cambodia to study the prevailing situation in the beleaguered country. On May 11, he and Prime Minister Miyazawa Kiichi told the Japanese Diet that the Paris accord was intact and that there was no violation of the ceasefire agreement.⁴¹ It is interesting to note that the ASEAN group which was supposed to have reservations on Japan's participation in UNTAC now strongly urged Japan to stick to its peace-keeping commitments in Cambodia.

As the National Assembly election approached, there cropped up rumours that Sihanouk and Son Sann might not participate in it. In a bid to forestall such a development, Japan urged all Cambodian faction leaders to participate in the election as planned and to put a stop to confrontations and violence. As Ikeda Tadashi says, the leaders took Tokyo's appeal seriously because of the trust Japan had built up with Cambodian groups—except, of course, the Khmer Rouge.⁴² Ultimately, elections were held during May 23-28, 1993 as per schedule, but without the participation of the Khmer Rouge. Considering the uncertainties that prevailed in Cambodia, the holding of the election to create legitimate government was not a mean achievement. 95% of the eligible voters were registered and despite Khmer Rouge's threats, about 90% of the voters exercised their franchise. The FUNCINPEC (Sihanouk faction) came on top, polling 45.2% of votes and bagging 58 out of the total 120 seats in the Constituent Assembly. The Cambodian People's Party (Hun Sen faction) received 38.6 % of the votes and captured 51 seats. Following the election, UNTAC went on to supervise the creation of a responsible government based on the new Constitution. Factional fighting among the principal political groups did not make it an easy task.

Conclusion: The Cambodian conflict was not a mere regional problem that involved only four warring local factions. The issue had far wider ramifications for both Asia and the world. The conflict in fact encapsulated the overlapping tensions of the Cold War rivalry, Sino-Soviet ideological friction and the traditional Sino-Vietnamese hostility. It started as a typical Cold War issue and Vietnam's military intervention in Cambodia in December 1977 inevitably aroused world-wide resentment. The traditional suspicions between Vietnam and China stoked the issue further. Though the US, China, ASEAN and Japan supported the tripartite anti-Heng Samrin coalition led by Norodom Sihanouk, their perceptions of and interest in the Cambodian situation were not one and the same. For instance, the US, ASEAN and Japan had strong reservations about the role of the Khmer Rouge faction in perpetrating mindless violence. China's support to the faction rested on ideological grounds, but even Beijing's support to the Khmer Rouge after 1988 became increasingly ambiguous and conditional. Following the reconciliation between Moscow and Beijing during 1988-89, there was a dramatic change in the strategic landscape of Asia in general and Indochina in particular. Moscow's decision to stop its military and economic aid to Vietnam almost precipitated Vietnam's withdrawal of its military forces from Cambodia. After the Tiananmen incident in June 1989, even Beijing, which had earlier supported the Khmer Rouge faction, changed its stance and started warming up to Vietnam. Further, the Gulf War of 1990-91 kept the major powers fully occupied in West Asia, to the neglect of developments in Cambodia.

As for Japan, it considered Cambodia as a testing ground for its future involvement in Asian affairs. Since 1952, burdened by the weight of World War II legacies, Japan had scrupulously avoided any involvement in the political /security issues in Southeast Asia and preferred to play a constructive role in the economic progress of the region. For the first time in June 1990, Tokyo took the initiative to convene a peace

conference of four Cambodian factions to explore a settlement of the issue. The conference marked a turning point in the sense that it changed the negotiations format from 'one plus three' to 'one plus one'. Even though it recognized the tripartite resistance government led by Norodom Sihanouk, it understood the compelling need to deal with the Phnom Penh regime, which virtually controlled ninety per cent of the Cambodian territory. Later, Japan in association with Thailand made persistent efforts to get the Khmer Rouge to accept and abide by the terms of the Paris Peace Agreement. In this process, it took independent initiatives that irritated even the US. What really added weight to Japan's role was its ability to make a strong commitment to economic reconstruction of Cambodia after a peace settlement. In 1992, Japan convened the Ministerial Conference on the Rehabilitation and Reconstruction of Cambodia which pledged a total of \$880 million and Japan's share of \$200 million was the highest. Thanks to its experience in the Gulf War in 1990-91, Japan understood clearly the importance of providing tangible, physical contribution to any collective military operation. There was a pressing urgency for Japan to take an initiative to commit its Self-Defence Forces to participate in overseas peace-keeping operations under the UN supervision. For almost two years, the Japanese Diet discussed a bill on the issue and in June 1992 it was passed with several conditions. Japan's participation in the UNTAC during 1992-93 was a major departure and set a precedent for Japan to participate in similar UN supervised peace-keeping operations. Though a late comer, Japan has now created a fairly good record for itself through its participation in several UN peace-keeping operations. One should also note that one of the main motives behind Japan's increasing peace-keeping role is linked to its quest for entering the UN Security Council as a permanent member.

.....

Endnotes

1. Sueo Sudo, Evolution of ASEAN-Japan Relations, (Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 2005) p12-13
2. Japan Times (Tokyo) 16 December 1978
3. See Lucy Keller, “UNTAC in Cambodia- from Occupation, Civil War and Genocide to Peace” in Max Planck Yearbook of United Nations Law, vol 9, 2005, pp136-38
4. Tokyo Shimbun (Evening) (Tokyo) 9 January 1979
5. Japan Times, 10 January 1979
6. Ibid, 26 January, 1979
7. Asahi Shimbun, (Evening) (Tokyo), 7 February 1979
8. Ibid, 9 February 1979
9. Ibid, 7 March 1979
10. Ibid 7 and 8 March 1979
11. Asian Security 1980 (Research Institute for Peace and Security, Tokyo) pp 185-86
12. Abe Isao's speech in the UN Security Council, Provisional S/PV 2111, 15 January 1979, p87
13. Ibid, S/PV 2116, 25 February 1979, p11
14. Sonoda Sunao's speech at Manila on 20 June 1981, Press Release, (Embassy of Japan, New Delhi), no 17, p6
15. Ibid
16. Asian Security 1989-90, pp 67-68
17. See Seki Tomoda, “Japan's Search for a Political Role in Asia: The Cambodian Peace Settlement”, in Japan Review of International Affairs (Tokyo) Spring, 1992, p46
18. See Japan Times Weekly, (Overseas Edition), vol 29, no 19, 13, May 1989
19. Ibid, vol 29, 22 July, 1989
20. See Yasuhiro Takeda, The Cambodian Peace Conference in Tokyo: An Historic Turning Point Towards Settling the Conflict? (IIGP Research Report, Tokyo July 1990)
21. See Tadashi Ikeda, The Road to Peace in Cambodia: Japan's Role and Involvement, (Tokyo, 1996), pp 72-73
22. Ibid, p 73
23. See the text of the joint communiqué in Japan Times, 6 June 1990
24. See Yasuhiro Takeda, “Japan's Role in the Cambodian Peace Process” Asian Survey (Berkeley, US), no 6, vol 38, June 1998, p 555
25. See Seki Tomoda, opp cit, p 50
26. See Paul Midford, “Japan's leadership role in East Asian multilateralism; the Nakayama proposal and the logic of reassurance”, Pacific Review, vol 13, no 3, 2000, pp367-97

27. See Tomoda, *op cit*, p50
28. *Ibid*,
29. See Lucy Keller, *op cit*, p145
30. *Ibid*, pp 145-46
31. For details, see Lucy Keller, pp 145-54
32. See Takeda, "Japan's Role." *op cit*, p556
33. Michael Green, *Japan's Reluctant Realism* (New York, 2001), p176
34. Japan Times, 11 June 1991
35. Ibid, 12 June 1991
36. Tadashi Ikeda, *op cit*, p 120
37. See "Current Issues Surrounding UN Peace-keeping Operations and Japanese Perspective" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan, 1997) <http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/un/pko/issues.html>
38. "Japanese Participation in UN Peace-keeping : Cambodia" http://www.go.jp/policy/un/pko/pamph/02_2html
39. Daily Yomiuri(Tokyo), 8 May 1993
40. *Ibid*, 10 April 1993
41. Japan Times, 12 May 1993
42. See Tadashi Ikeda, *op cit*, p 120

ORF PUBLICATIONS:

- South and Southeast Asia: Responding to Changing Geo-Political and Security Challenges Edited by K.V. Kesavan and Daljit Singh ORF-Knowledge World
- India's Nuclear Diplomacy after Pokhran II
Ajai. K. Rai, ORF- Pearson-Longman
- The Future of Conflict and Security in India's Emerging Political Environment
Neil Padukone, ORF-Knowledge World
- Revisiting the Sino-Indian-border dispute—Prospects for Resolution
Mohan Guruswamy, Zorawar Daulet Singh, ORF-Viva
- Occasional Paper: India-Myanmar Relations (1998-2008): A Decade of Redefining Bilateral ties, K. Yhome
- ORF Seminar Series, Implementation of Right to Information Act: Issues and Challenges
Wajahat Habibullah
- India and China: The Next Decade
Edited by S. D. Muni and Suranjan Das, ORF-Rupa
- Managed Chaos, The Fragility of the Chinese Miracle
Prem Shankar Jha, ORF-Sage
- The New Asian Power Dynamic, edited by Maharajakrishna Rasgotra; (ORF- Sage 2007)
- Democracy in Muslim Societies : The Asian Experience (ORF Studies in Contemporary Muslim Societies-IV), edited by Zoya Hasan (ORF-Sage 2007)
- India and Central Asia : Potential for Regional Co-operation, by Ajish P. Joy (ORF-Sanskriti 2007)
- The Naxal Challenge: Causes, Linkages and Policy Options, edited by P.V. Ramana (ORF-Pearson Longman 2007)
- Maritime Counter-Terrorism A Pan-Asian Perspective, Edited by Swati Parashar (ORF Pearson Longman 2007)
- Pakistan: Four Scenarios, by Wilson John (ORF-Pentagon Press 2007)
- ORF Policy Brief - Terrorism and Human rights, Wilson John and P.V. Ramana (2007)
- A Nation in Transition: Understanding the Indian Economy, by Jayshree Sengupta; (ORF-Academic Foundation 2007)
- The Politics of Power Sector Reform in India, by Niranjana Sahoo; (ORF- Pentagon Press 2007)
- Extremism and Opposition Movements on the Arabian Peninsula, by Joseph A. Kechichian (ORF 2006)

Observer Research Foundation is a public policy think-tank that aims to influence formulation of policies for building a strong and prosperous India. ORF pursues these goals by providing informed and productive inputs, in-depth research and stimulating discussions. The Foundation is supported in its mission by a cross-section of India's leading public figures, academics and business leaders.

₹ 195/



Observer Research Foundation
20, Rouse Avenue, New Delhi-110 002
Email: orf@orfonline.org
Phone: +91-11-43520020 Fax: +91-11-43520003
www.orfonline.org