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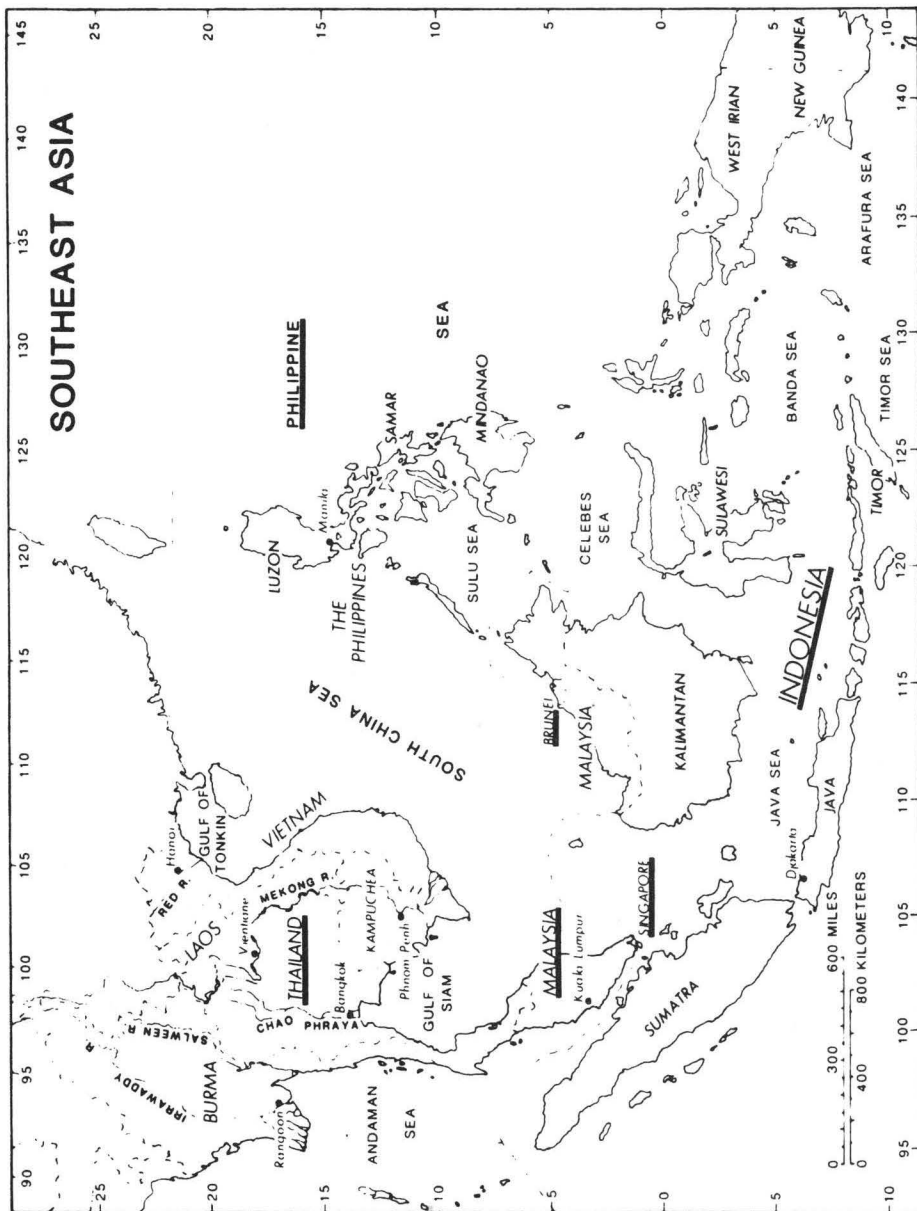
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Names of members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) appear underlined on the map above.
 Source: Ashok K. Dutt, *Southeast Asia: Realm of Contrasts*, 3rd ed. (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1985), p. 3.



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Introduction¹

By 1990, the decade-long conflict in Cambodia caused by Vietnamese military occupation of the country had entered a new stage, and negotiations for a peace agreement had become more active. Vietnam withdrew most if not all its forces from Cambodia. Vietnamese officials and representatives of its client government in Phnom Penh expressed some flexibility regarding a compromise political settlement of the Cambodian conflict. This was strongly encouraged by their main international supporter, the Soviet Union. The three resistance groups (those led by the Khmer Rouge, Prince Sihanouk, and former Prime Minister Son Sann -- see Appendix C) and their main international backers in China, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) -- see map, and the United States responded with varying degrees of flexibility.

All parties in the conflict appeared to see their interests as better served by making some adjustment in their positions, rather than by sticking to the intransigence of the previous 10 years. They held repeated deliberations, including an international conference on Cambodia that began in Paris July 30, 1989. But obstacles to a peace agreement remained. They centered on guaranteeing Vietnam's military withdrawal and achieving a peace agreement in Cambodia that would neither allow the return of the genocidal practices of the Khmer Rouge, nor permit Vietnam to continue domination over Cambodia.

U.S. policy faces dilemmas in Cambodia. Most notably the United States wants to help push back Vietnamese expansion in Indochina, and to support the positions of our treaty ally Thailand and other friends in ASEAN. But the United States strongly opposes the Khmer Rouge and fears that Vietnamese withdrawal may result in expanded scope for the Khmer Rouge and their brutal rule. In the past, U.S. policy dealt with these competing pressures by adopting a low posture that followed the lead of ASEAN. The United States has provided small amounts of nonlethal assistance to the two noncommunist resistance forces led by Prince Sihanouk and Son Sann, but it has

refused any support to the third and most powerful member of the resistance groups, the Khmer Rouge. As the Vietnamese began to withdraw and the search for a peace agreement intensified, U.S. policymakers in the Bush administration and Congress proposed steps to strengthen the two noncommunist resistance groups led by Sihanouk and Son Sann, to block the return to power of the Khmer Rouge, and to relieve human suffering in Cambodia.

But U.S. policymakers strongly disagree about what steps are appropriate to reach these goals and support broader foreign policy objectives. Policy issues facing them at the start of the 1990s include the following:

- What are the most effective means for the United States to follow in order to curb the supply of weapons to the Khmer Rouge, or to otherwise insure that these Cambodian communists are not allowed to return to a dominant position of power in Cambodia?
- Should the United States strengthen the influence of the two noncommunist resistance forces that maintain a loose alignment with the Khmer Rouge against the Vietnamese-backed communist government in Phnom Penh?
- What is the effect on U.S. influence in the Cambodian situation of the absence of normal U.S. relations with Vietnam? What are the pros and cons of normalizing relations with Hanoi and what are the main procedures that would have to be considered in such normalization of relations?
- What is the appropriate U.S. policy toward China, the Soviet Union, Japan and other powers in regard to a Cambodian settlement? Is there possible common ground among them that could help to foster a settlement that would be in the interests of the United States? Is the United Nations or some other forum appropriate for these powers to meet to discuss Cambodia?
- How do U.S. policy interests in a Cambodian settlement and possible normalization of relations with Vietnam fit in with broad U.S. economic and humanitarian concerns including resolution of longstanding interests over U.S. prisoners of war and missing in action (POWs/MIAs) from the Vietnam War and the large refugee populations coming from Vietnam and Cambodia?

Current U.S. Interests Regarding Cambodia and Vietnam

The collapse of the U.S.-supported governments in Phnom Penh and Saigon in 1975 marked the end of the U.S. role, begun in the 1950s, as the major foreign actor in Indochina. Under terms of the Nixon doctrine begun in 1969, the United States had already withdrawn U.S. combat troops from mainland Asia (with the notable exception of Korea) and had made clear to U.S. allies and associates that they would bear more responsibility for their own defense. Nevertheless, the United States has continued to maintain important political-strategic and humanitarian interests, and lesser economic concerns, in relations with Cambodia and Vietnam. U.S. policy in this area also is particularly sensitive because of the deep impact which the Vietnam War has had on American society and on the lives of several million U.S. servicemen and their families.

America's current political-strategic interests center on assuring a settlement in Cambodia that restores stability to Southeast Asia, secures the interests of our treaty ally Thailand and the other members of ASEAN, and checks the expansion of Soviet influence--through Vietnam or other means--in Southeast Asia. Such stability has been seen as unlikely to be restored under a peace agreement that allows the Vietnamese to continue to dominate Cambodia through its client, the PRK (also known as the "State of Cambodia") or other means; or one that allows the Khmer Rouge significantly to expand its power and re-establish draconian rule in the country.

The United States has a strong interest in the strategically and economically important communication routes that converge at the Straits of Malacca and other passageways in the region. The Soviet presence at U.S.-built bases in Vietnam--including Soviet bombers, fighter aircraft, submarines, and surface warships--has at times posed a potentially serious challenge to U.S. access to those routes,² but in late 1989, Moscow pulled back some forces from bases in Vietnam.³ U.S. interest in working with ASEAN members to check Soviet-backed Vietnamese expansion proceeded in parallel with U.S. cooperation with other Asian regional actors concerned with Soviet and Vietnamese influence, notably China and Japan. Indeed, common opposition to suspected Soviet expansion or "hegemonism" in Asia was a central feature of U.S.-Chinese negotiations following President Nixon's opening to Beijing in 1972.

American humanitarian interests focus on prompting Vietnam to fully account for U.S. MIAs; facilitate orderly emigration procedures for Vietnamese relatives of U.S. residents and citizens, including children fathered by U.S. servicemen prior to 1975; release from detention and

allow to emigrate Vietnamese associated with the U.S.-backed government of South Vietnam; and create measures to avoid the large-scale outflow of Vietnamese citizens in dangerously ill-equipped boats who fall prey to pirate atrocities, starvation, and other suffering. In Cambodia, humanitarian concerns for the well-being of the Cambodian people prompt the United States to press for international and other measures that would curb the power of the Khmer Rouge as the United States and other nations continue to urge a complete Vietnamese withdrawal.

U.S. economic interests are modest but include the possibility of developing trade and resources, such as off-shore oil, in Vietnam. A more immediate economic concern is to avoid having to pay a high price for restoration of normal relations with Phnom Penh or Hanoi. In particular, the U.S. government opposes past Vietnamese demands for several billion dollars in U.S. war reparations to Vietnam.

U.S. policy toward Vietnam also strives to avoid exacerbating past acrimonious debate over the war and where possible to reconcile the wide range of impulses and views within the United States regarding the Vietnam War. Those often contradictory impulses and views include the following:

- Continuing bitterness and hostility toward an enemy who killed over 50,000 Americans, has been slow in accounting for the U.S. MIAs, and is suspected by some in the United States of holding some live POWs.
- The desire for reconciliation with a former enemy.
- Unresolved attitudes about the issues and impact of the war, and a disposition on the part of some Americans, with the passage of time, to move on to new items on the national agenda.⁴

The recent interest of U.S. policymakers in a more assertive American role in Indochina marks a change from the relatively passive role adopted by the United States in the region following the defeat of U.S.-backed regimes in Saigon and Phnom Penh in 1975. It also reflects the changing realities of international power affecting Southeast Asia. In particular, the communist regimes in Moscow, Beijing and Hanoi have all become increasingly preoccupied in recent years with internal difficulties, and have been unable or unwilling to pursue the heretofore hardline policies that had made for a protracted impasse over the Cambodian conflict during most of the 1980s. In the newly fluid situation, the United States is able to exert more influence

and its support is widely sought after by various competing actors in the Cambodian conflict.

In view of this changed situation, there is a need for basic information and analysis to assist the general American public in assessing the Cambodian crisis and its implications for U.S. interests. This brief study is designed to help meet some of that need. It is very much a synthetic work that relies heavily on and attempts to bring together the work of others in the field. As noted in footnotes below, it has made heavy use of available U.S. government reports and documents that are helpful in assessing Cambodian and Vietnamese developments and U.S. policy concerns. Chapter 1 introduces the current U.S. policy issues and interests concerning the crisis in Cambodia. Chapter 2 reviews the history of Cambodia, its recent foreign relations and the current state of the Cambodian economy and society. Chapter 3 provides an overview of the impasse in the Cambodian conflict that prevailed throughout much of the 1980s and assesses developments in the late 1980s that gave rise to the more fluid situation we face today. Chapter 4 looks in detail at U.S. policy concerns in both Cambodia and Vietnam. Chapter 5 concludes the study with a brief assessment of the likelihood of a more prominent U.S. leading role in policy toward Cambodia and Vietnam.

The study has several appendices and supporting materials. Appendix A provides a guide to the key leaders among the four competing factions in Cambodia. Appendix B examines at length procedural and jurisdictional questions that would be addressed if and when the United States decided to normalize diplomatic or economic relations with Vietnam. There is a chronology of significant events since 1975, a guide to further reading, a chart giving the status of the military-political groups active in Cambodia, a chart noting the contending groups and their stance on a peace agreement as of early 1990, and a chart giving key indicators regarding Cambodia and Vietnam. A map of Southeast Asia appears before page one.

Notes

1. The views expressed in this monograph are those of the author and not necessarily those of the Congressional Research or the Library of Congress.

2. Also, U.S. investment in ASEAN has grown steadily from a level of about \$10 billion in the mid-1980s and U.S. trade has grown to a point that ASEAN, taken as a unit, is among the top 10 trading partners of the United States.

3. See, for instance, coverage of a January 19, 1990, Soviet announcement regarding a withdrawal of forces from Vietnam in the *New York Times*, January 20, 1990, p. A4.

4. Some press reports interpreted in this light President Bush's reference to Vietnam in his January 20, 1989, Inaugural Address.