

## BOOK REVIEWS

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***Cambodia — The 1989 Paris Peace Conference: Background Analysis and Documents. Compiled and edited by Amitav Acharya, Pierre Lizée, and Sorpong Peou.*** Toronto: Centre for International and Strategic Studies, York University, 1991. 592 pp.

In the past thirteen years, three international conferences had been held to find a political solution to end the war in Cambodia, but only one was successful. The first conference, held in Geneva in July 1981, was organized by the United Nations on the urging of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). It did not achieve any results because it was boycotted by Vietnam, the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK), the regime installed by Vietnamese forces in January 1979, and their socialist allies, and India. The second conference was organized by the French Government in response to a call by Prince Norodom Sihanouk, leader of the Cambodian resistance. It was held in Paris from 30 July to 30 August 1989. It too was unsuccessful. The third conference, also held in Paris in October 1991, saw the signing of the Cambodian peace accord by the four Cambodian factions and nineteen countries.

On paper at least, the Cambodian conflict has ended. But at best, it is a fragile peace. To be sure, Vietnam and the PRK were compelled to accept the U.N.-brokered peace accord because of economic difficulties caused by the reduction of Soviet and East European aid. Only the deployment of a large U.N. peace-keeping force inside Cambodia will prevent the peace accord from unravelling. But since the signing of the peace accord on 23 October 1991, there has been a lack of political will on the part of the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council

(Permanent Five) to overcome the main problem that is delaying the deployment of U.N. troops to Cambodia, namely, the lack of funds. Should there be a fourth international conference to give the Cambodian peace process a needed push?

Seen in this context, the publication of a book on the 1989 Paris Peace Conference on Cambodia seems out of place. When the three scholars — Amitav, Lizée and Peou — from York University's Centre for International and Strategic Studies embarked on their project to compile such a book, they probably did not envisage that the Cambodian conflict would end so quickly. Indeed, it took the Cambodian factions slightly less than three months — from late June to mid-September — to resolve all their differences and accept the U.N. peace plan as the basis for the final settlement. This "mad rush" — as one Thai English-language newspaper put it — towards peace by the Cambodian factions fuelled speculation that China and Vietnam had reached a secret deal, the so-called "Red solution". At the crucial stages of the negotiations, China and Vietnam did lean on their respective Cambodian clients, to pressurize them to accept the U.N. peace plan. No evidence is available at the moment to suggest that such a deal had indeed been struck by Beijing and Hanoi, which would have required the PRK and the Khmer Rouge to share power, thus doing away with free elections in Cambodia.

While the 1991 conference has overshadowed the 1989 Paris Peace Conference in importance, this book does serve some usefulness for scholars who are interested in studying the Cambodian peace process. It is a useful reference record of a particular phase of the Cambodian peace process. The book contains the opening statements made by the leaders of the four Cambodian factions and the representatives of the countries participating in the conference, as well as the main documents circulated at the various committees that were tasked by the conference to work out solutions to the different aspects of the Cambodian settlement. The editors also included the more important documents of the meetings of the Permanent Five that were held after the suspension of the conference, including the Australian proposal for an interim U.N. administration to run Cambodia, which later formed the basis for the U.N. peace plan.

To help the general reader, the editors have, in the introductory chapter, provided a background article on the conflict, essentially tracing the events that led to the convening of the 1989 peace conference. In the last sub-section of the introductory chapter, under the heading "Could There Be Success In Paris", the editors tried to explain why the Paris Peace Conference had failed. The reasons cited by them were, however, too general to be of any help to the reader trying to understand the causes

for the failure of the peace conference. Indeed, this is the major weakness of the book. While the reader does not expect a blow-by-blow account of the proceedings at the plenary sessions and at the various committees, having sifted through the speeches and documents the editors should at least have given a flavour of the different positions taken by the various delegations at the conference. The reader will have to plough through the documents himself to get this sense. In journalistic parlance, this book is not "reader-friendly".

One point which was not sufficiently developed in the introductory chapter was the timing of the conference. What were the compelling reasons that led France to convene the conference in July 1989? Two major events had indeed taken place earlier that year which might have prompted Prince Sihanouk to push for such a conference. The first was the visit of the then Soviet President, Mikhail Gorbachev, to Beijing in May, marking the complete normalization of relations between China and the Soviet Union. The Chinese Government had laid down three conditions for normalization of relations with Moscow. These were: Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, reduction of Soviet forces along the Sino-Soviet border, and a halt to Soviet support for Vietnam in the Cambodian conflict. That Beijing agreed to normalize relations with Moscow even without the latter acting on the third condition suggests that the Chinese leadership had by early 1989 shifted its priorities, from undermining the Vietnamese position in Cambodia to establishing good relations with Moscow.

The second event was the violent suppression of student demonstrators at Tiananmen Square in June, which resulted in the international isolation of China. Most observers at that time opined that, faced with such a situation, China would not be obstructive in Paris in order not to further strain its relations with the Western countries, particularly the United States. Indeed, unlike the first international conference in 1981, the Chinese delegation was reportedly more co-operative in Paris in 1989.

That the conference still failed to advance the cause of peace in Cambodia indicates that a co-operative China alone would not help bring about a settlement to the Cambodian conflict. Indeed, two years later a confluence of international events helped to pressurize the main protagonists of the conflict, specifically Vietnam and the PRK, to accept the U.N. peace plan. These were: first, the dissolution of COMECON, the Soviet-dominated socialist economic grouping, and the disintegration of the Soviet Union, which further increased the economic hardship faced by Vietnam and the PRK; secondly, the Cambodian factions were concerned that the international community was losing interest in their quarrel, and that there were competing demands for Western aid; thirdly, the

Permanent Five, emboldened by the success of the Gulf War, were determined to push through their peace plan by putting the economic squeeze on Hanoi and Phnom Penh; fourthly, the United States refused to be pressurized into lifting the trade embargo on Vietnam; and fifthly, Hanoi's calculation that good relations with China was necessary for its own economic survival as well as the survival of the Vietnamese Communist Party. Indeed, both the Chinese and Vietnamese leaderships share the belief that their brand of communism, which is indigenously based compared to that of the East European states, which was imposed by the Soviet Red Army, could stand the test of time.

Clearly, international developments more than the military situation inside Cambodia were the decisive factors in helping to end the thirteen-year-old war in Cambodia. It would, therefore, be useful to compare the circumstances that led to the convening of the failed 1989 Paris Peace Conference and the events that contributed to the Cambodian peace accord in 1991. Such a study may produce useful lessons for resolving other regional conflicts.

Having initiated the publication of the book on the 1989 Paris Peace Conference, it is perhaps incumbent on York University's Centre for International and Strategic Studies to carry through the study of the Cambodian peace process by commissioning a second volume on the 1991 Paris Peace Conference.

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***Unholy Grail: The U.S. and the Wars in Vietnam 1965-68.* By Larry Cable.** Routledge, 25 July 1991. 292 pp.

Historical analyses of the conflicts in Vietnam, and particularly the U.S. calamitous role in that country's struggle for liberation and unification, are all too numerous. Researchers continue to wade through colossal volumes of material which the Washington administrations of Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon — as well as those before and after — indirectly generated in their failed bid to prevent communist control over the Indochina peninsula. Unlike Hanoi's limited release of information on its thirty years of bitter war against enemies within and without, the United States produced (and continues to produce) a plethora of documentation from