



Kampuchean troops in Takeo, a battlefield before the big invasion and now.

Vietnam blitzkrieg bogs down in Kampuchea (Cambodia)

First hand report from S.E. Asia

Following is a Workers Voice interview with George C. Hildebrand, a Southeast Asia scholar and journalist, who is co-author of one of the few books in the English language on Kampuchea today, "Cambodia: Starvation and Revolution." Some comments were added by Stephen Heder, a writer for Time magazine from Cambodia from 1973-75, and currently a student of Southeast Asian affairs. Hildebrand and Heder were in Asia in January and February where they spoke with Kampuchean and visited China, Thailand, and the Thai-Kampuchean border region.

Since the Vietnamese invaded Kampuchea December 25 and marched into the capital, Phnom Penh, January 7, how much do they control?

They hold the cities and the major highways - not the people. At first the western press was impressed by the Vietnamese attack. But we do not want to be misled by this blitzkrieg. The Kampuchean chose not to fight where they were weak; they evacuated the cities and fell back on the countryside where they could organize peoples' war. The Kampuchean military, largely intact, regrouped in the countryside, many into battalion-sized units.

There's a pretty high level of very heavy, organized resistance going on. The Kampuchean Revolutionary Army forces have been able to launch attacks in all major parts of the country. They occupied the city of Takeo - very close to Vietnam - for almost a week. They attacked the port of Kompong Som on the sea, and downtown Pursat, right in the middle of the country.

As for the outlying areas, peoples' war means you fight everywhere the enemy comes. There are peoples' militias throughout the country supporting the larger military units.

What do these civilians do?

Heder: Everybody is organized to do something for the front. The military conscription-age men are all at the front lines. And everybody else is back behind. They're all armed. The women and the old people make bam-

boo traps and package rice in banana leaves. And then the children load the rice packets on the trucks to be driven off to the front. The children go out and put the bamboo spikes in place. Everybody is busy. Everybody seems to have their own task.

If the Kampuchean are waging a peoples' war, how would you describe what the Vietnamese are doing?

The Vietnamese launched a massive invasion on a number of different fronts in armoured columns with heavy air support. It was very much like an American-style attack - an extremely heavy, modernized conventional war approach. The Vietnamese describe it as a "blooming lotus" approach. You hit hard at the center and then fan out and try to mop up the opposition in columns. It's a full transition from peoples' war to conventional war, which mirrors the political transition from being a nation fighting for its independence against U.S. imperialism, to being an

aggressor nation trying to attack a neighbor state and take it over.

Who is leading the Kampuchean resistance now?

It's a standing military committee of the political committee of the Kampuchean Communist Party. It's under the direction of the Prime Minister and Party Secretary Pol Pot.

So politically and militarily it's a continuation of the Democratic Kampuchea government?

It is Democratic Kampuchea. My guess is they're been prepared for an invasion for quite a long time.

What do you know about how Kampuchean lived under the Pol Pot government from 1975 when it liberated the country from the U.S. and the Lon Nol regime until the Vietnamese invasion?

American journalists (from the Washington Post and the Philadelphia *(cont. on page 10)*



Kampuchean civilians pack rice rations in banana leaves to be sent to guerillas at the front.

Kampuchea interview (cont. from page 9)

Inquirer) who visited in December, right before the invasion, were quite surprised at a number of things. They didn't see guns, except right along the frontier where the problem with Vietnam was developing. They didn't see people working under armed guards, as had been charged. The people looked good, they had food and medicine.

They had a self-reliance strategy for the country as a whole and also on the local level. Every area was responsible for itself. Agricultural communes produced rice and other food products.

There was a decentralized industrial system. There were repair shops and small factories all around the country to serve the people. They would make things like dinner plates or repair tractors.

In the areas which had been organized by the resistance for a long time leading up to liberation, things were very good. There was enough food and medicine. People were satisfied. In some other areas there wasn't enough. These are the most newly organized areas, where many people came from the city, who didn't have a developed political consciousness or understanding of what they should do.

In 1976 and '77 there wasn't enough rain, which made the situation more difficult. Last year was a much better year. They were beginning to make things work. That's not bad in such a short time.

Here is one indication of how things were organized. We met a group of 200 Kampuchean who had just come into Thailand after the invasion. They fled Kampuchea because they heard rumors that many people in a neighboring village had been killed.

We took some cigarettes and candy to them in the tent where they were staying. One guy took the candy and went around the room and gave one piece to each child. No child grabbed. No child asked for more. They took the 25 packages of cigarettes and emptied them all into one large plastic bag. One man took them around the room and gave 4 or 5 to each man. Everyone smoked exactly one and put the rest away for the future. It was eerie-impressive. The impression we got was there was some kind of faith in the distribution system, that it would be fair. Without anyone telling

anyone, or anyone creating a fuss in the other direction, it was like, "this is the way things ought to be done." I think this is an indication about the way they were living.

Are there those who maybe didn't support the Pol Pot government before and now are participating in the resistance?

There's been something of a re-organization into a new national united front - the National Democratic and Patriotic Front. They're stressing the broad participation of all sectors in this. I think this would strike a chord with those Kampuchean who might have disagreed with the government beforehand. The Kampuchean want their own country, they don't want a Vietnamese country.

This united front is internal and external. Former Prime Minister Prince Norodom Sihanouk went abroad to speak for Democratic Kampuchea. When I was in Thailand, Kampuchean refugees who had been anti-communist and anti-Democratic Kampuchea, held demonstrations against the Vietnamese invasion as soon as they heard about it.

It seems that the Vietnamese are running into a lot more problems than they expected. Why do you think they invaded in the first place and why are they running into such problems?

The Vietnamese established the so-called Kampuchean National United Front for National Salvation which set up a new government in Kampuchea. But even journalists who went in who were sympathetic to the Vietnamese said there did not seem to be very much to this Front, either in terms of state administration or popular support. They said this privately - they didn't publish it.

I don't see any program the Salvation Front can offer that could bring them wide support. They lose on the nationalist issue, because they are backed by the Vietnamese and that's obvious to everybody. If you take the idea of freedom - if any free or even slightly free system is set up in the areas they control, it would allow scope for guerrilla activity. And the moment guerrilla activity appears, the Vietnamese will repress to terrify the population into

stopping their support for the guerrillas.

Another problem would be rice. In Vietnam a lot of people are starving. They don't have enough rice. Well, what do they do with the Kampuchean rice? If they decide to take it to Vietnam, obviously the phoney Front isn't going to be very popular, they can't win support there.

If the Vietnamese are willing to go to such extremes, like you're saying, wholesale purges, killings, taking food, what's their reason for doing this?

They're extremely isolated in Asia. They decided they needed to breakout of it. They saw Kampuchea on their doorstep as getting stronger and stronger, as being anti-Soviet and closer to China. They wanted to be independent, but at the same time they wanted a much closer relationship with the Soviet Union.

What do they want to gain from that?

They hoped for economic aid and support, a development plan. They say they wanted to be independent, that they didn't want to get into relying on the Soviets, that they wanted American recognition, and U.S. aid. But with their policy in Kampuchea, they needed an extraordinary amount of supplies and political support. Their feeling on Kampuchea was they've got to insure compliance with what they wanted on every level, not only international alignment, but in terms of the kind of development scheme that is favorable to the development of Vietnam itself. That forces them to turn to the Soviets, in order to deal with Kampuchea.

How would you describe the aims of the Kampuchean?

They want a strong and independent country. They say, 'How can we guarantee the survival of our country, how can we guarantee there will be a Kampuchea in 10 or 20 years?' That requires a lot of sacrifice, a lot of patriotism. That explains the combativeness of the Kampuchean. They say that in the long run, 'Nobody's going to stand up for us - we have to rely on ourselves. We've got to get our show together.'

With these two sides so diametrically opposed, what are the reactions of the other countries in the region? What did you hear while you were in Thailand?

First off, I don't see that there's any compromise possible. The Kampuchean are not going to give up their independence. The Vietnamese don't think there's any solution but a military conquest to insure that Kampuchea is subservient to them. I don't see any possible agreement.

So the prospect is that the war is going to go on.

There was a condemnation of the Vietnamese invasion at the emergency meeting of the Association of South-East Asian Nations. In Thailand, the sentiment has been largely against the Vietnamese. The Thai military regime itself is not unhappy that the Vietnamese are going to be bogged down there fighting for a long time. Their second preference would certainly be an independent Kampuchea under Pol Pot.

Among the left I would say there are probably some people who are sympathetic with Vietnam, and there are some pro-Soviet tendencies in that area, but largely the left is not in sympathy with the Vietnamese. The implications for the Vietnamese in the long run are not so good. They're putting themselves at odds not only with the right-wing governments, but also with the left movements in the area.

China-Vietnam . . . (cont. from page 9)

The US government did not attack China outright for the invasion. While criticizing it, American officials linked the call for China to withdraw from Vietnam to a call for Vietnam to leave Kampuchea.

But the US ruling class revealed something else in its response. Politicians and the news media alike fretted that China's "desperate gamble" would drag the Soviet Union into the conflict and precipitate a new world war. President Carter gave a speech in Atlanta, vowing that under no circumstances would the US involve itself militarily in the conflicts breaking out around the world. In part, this position is an acknowledgement that since Vietnam, the American people are not willing to go to war to defend the interests of the corporate giants that run this country.

But it also shows that the ruling class of this country is dazed by a long string of defeats and unable to come to grips with its decline in the world. Deng Xiaoping highlighted this kind of thinking on February 22 when he said:

"Both the Cuba of the Orient and the Cuba of the West seem emboldened by the so-called tremendous

backing force behind them. Now some people in the world are afraid of offending them.

"Even if they do something terrible, these people wouldn't dare take action against them. It's a question of being afraid of them."

PAPER POLAR BEAR

China's leaders speak and act from long years of experience. In the war against Japan, the Chinese learned the importance of uniting all who could be united against the main enemy. And they have summed up that the period preceding World War 2 shows that efforts to appease Germany's rise to power with concessions only added to its appetite.

In the past two decades, revolutionary struggles in countries around the globe have shown US imperialism to be a paper tiger. China's action against Vietnam shows that the Soviet's agents have to pay for their aggression. And China wants to demonstrate to the world by standing up to the Soviet Union and its huge military machine that this mighty power is, in the final analysis, just a paper polar bear.