World public opinion at the moment is focussed on the question of Kampuchea and particularly on Viet Nam — Kampuchea relations. How can one assess the situation in that country?

The government of the People's Republic of Kampuchea is in complete control of the situation there. One year after liberation it can be affirmed that the rebirth of this country which was literally disintegrated by four years of Pol Pot rule is an undeniable fact. Six hundred and fifty thousand
hectares of land have been brought back under cultivation and the first harvest has already been gathered. Together with international aid, which is becoming larger and better distributed, this has averted the threat of famine. Though there are still serious problems in the food supply, this does not alter the fact that the alarmist reports which appear so frequently in the Western press have more to do with psychological warfare than with news. The situation has become irreversible, in the sense that no force in the world is any longer capable of putting agents of Beijing or any other power back in the saddle in Phnom Penh.

Where does the Heng Samrin government's strength come from? In the West it is often claimed that this regime is only held up by the support of the Vietnamese forces.

The Pol Pot regime, barbaric as it was, was unable to prevent the creation of a resistance, which began as early as 1975. Though forcibly repressed, this resistance nevertheless managed in about mid-1978 to form itself into a solid organization, notably among officers and political cadres of the army. President Heng Samrin is himself one of these officers of the Pol Pot army who realised that Pol Pot's political line was leading the country straight into total extermination. Then the National United Front for the Salvation of Kampuchea (NUFSK) was set up and the present government was formed from this organization. The base of the Heng Samrin government is this vast opposition to Pol Pot's reign of terror, it is the grim determination of the whole population never again to let the agents of Beijing and the imperialist powers return to power. For that would mean a new massacre followed by another war against Viet Nam.

Why are Vietnamese forces still stationed in Kampuchea? And how long will they stay?

The Vietnamese forces came firstly to pursue the Pol Pot troops who had attacked Viet Nam, and then at the request of the NUFSK to help to save the Kampuchean people from genocide. Now the routed Pol Pot troops have regrouped in Thailand, where they are fed and equipped by Beijing. Pro-American forces, the Khmer Serei are also based in Thailand. The Khmer Rouge and Khmer Serei are recruiting among the refugees, and combine to form a real counter-revolutionary army, which Beijing and Washington are trying to get back into the country in order to unleash civil war and overthrow the government of the People's Republic of Kampuchea. This government, which is in the process of consolidating itself, asked for help from Viet Nam and an agreement was signed in February 1979 between the two governments. Under the terms of this agreement, Vietnamese troops will stay in the country until the day when the Kampuchean governments asks them to withdraw. The day when the Kampuchean government will be capable by itself of resisting the threat of the pro-Chinese and pro-American forces, it will ask the Vietnamese forces to leave. All the Vietnamese hope fervently that this day will come as soon as possible: Vietnamese troops will not stay a day longer. But as long as the Kampuchean government has not made this request, no force in the world can oblige them to withdraw. Certain governments have pressurized Viet Nam by cutting off economic aid, China is threatening to make war on us. Viet Nam will accept any hardship and sacrifice to keep its commitments to the Kampuchean people.

Why such stubbornness? Hasn't Viet Nam had enough of war? And isn't aid to Kampuchea a very heavy burden?

Viet Nam has to send to Kampuchea troops, workers, technicians, doctors, and specialists in a variety of fields, to help our Kampuchean friends defend and rebuild their country. The Pol Pot men destroyed even families' crockery, even school stationery. We have had to send foodstuffs, medicines, cooking utensils, exercise books, pens and pencils, although our people also suffer serious shortages of food and goods. Our government has no difficulty convincing the Vietnamese people to make these sacrifices, because for every Vietnamese person to defend Kampuchea and help it to rebuild, is to defend and help Viet Nam itself.

It is said that the Vietnamese and Kampuchean peoples are motivated by age-old feelings of mutual hostility.

It is true that in past centuries the Vietnamese and Kampuchean monarchs were often at war. In the 13th century, an Angkor king tried on two occasions to invade...
Viet Nam, then from the 17th century onwards, Vietnamese kings invaded Kampuchea repeatedly and annexed the lower part of the Mekong delta. But if one goes back through the centuries, it was the Thais (formerly called the Siamese) who destroyed the Angkor Empire, and not the Vietnamese; and the last annexation of Kampuchean territory by the Thais was not in the 17th century, but in 1940 when with Japanese support they took from Kampuchea vast areas of Battambang, Stung Treng and Kompong Thom provinces. Neither the mass media of Beijing, nor those of the West mention this age-old hatred between Kampucheans and Thais. When this ancient hostility between Vietnamese and Kampucheans is evoked and when attempts are made to keep it going and worsen it, this is for precise political objectives. Another historical trend which has developed since the colonial conquest is forgotten, or deliberately ignored: the militant solidarity between the Vietnamese and Kampuchean peoples in opposition to colonialism for the reconquest of their independence.

Would you please give us an idea of this militant solidarity?

During the war of liberation against the French forces, from 1945 to 1954, Kampuchean patriots created a National Liberation Front and called for the aid of Vietnamese troops. So Vietnamese and Kampuchean patriots fought side by side for many years, yet the Vietnamese forces withdrew as soon as the French colonialists retreated from Kampuchea. From 1954 to 1970, the Sihanouk government succeeded in maintaining its independence and neutrality. But in 1970 Sihanouk was overthrown by the pro-American government of Lon Nol, and in order to resist the American and pro-American forces, Sihanouk called for Vietnamese troops. Once again, the Vietnamese came to fight side by side with the Khmer resisters, only to withdraw straight away in 1975 after the liberation of Phnom Penh. So it is not the first time that Kampuchean patriots have called for Vietnamese help.

What is Sihanouk's attitude to this question?

Sihanouk is a complex and changeable person. On the one hand, he is a feudalist and a paternal despot wielding a completely personal power. On the other, he is on occasion a patriot. According to the circumstances, one side or the other may dominate. Until 1953 he found little difficulty in accepting the French protectorate and then Japanese domination, and then French tutelage again. The armed resistance against the French from 1945 to 1954 worried Sihanouk as much as it did the French. In 1953, to check the resistance, the French signed an agreement which restored independence to Kampuchea, giving power to Sihanouk, who was there and then proclaimed as a great patriot who had seized independence from the hands of the French. From 1954 to 1975, Sihanouk did recognise that the great enemy of Kampuchea was American imperialism, which had already taken hold of South Viet Nam and part of Laos, and that he could count on Viet Nam to resist the American domination. He had enough lucidity to see that the Americans could not win in Indochina, but he lacked the courage to refuse in 1969 the renewal of mainly American military aid. He also refused to democratise political life in the country, concentrating all power in his own hands.

Though his political cleverness allowed the country to keep its neutrality until 1970, his mistakes opened up the way for the manoeuvres of pro-American groups and led to the coup d'état of March 1970. From 1970 to 1975 he lived in Beijing; from 1975 to 1979 he was the prisoner of Pol Pot, then exiled himself to Beijing again. Since 1970 he has had practically no contact with the Kampuchean people, for whom the most important thing today is to oppose the return of the pro-Chinese forces, whether they are led by Pol Pot or Khieu Samphan or Sihanouk. I think that the collusion between Beijing and Washington has deeply impressed him and led him to think that the revolutionary movement of the Indochinese peoples would never be able to defeat such a massive force.

In any case, all those in Kampuchea who seek foreign help to try and oppose the present government are doomed to failure. In face of the Chinese threat today, the Indochinese peoples are more united and stronger than ever.

How can one explain what happened in Kampuchea under Pol Pot?
Pol Pot's politics have two principal aspects: genocide at home, and war to the death against Viet Nam in foreign policy. Two factors came together to cause this: firstly the Pol Pot—Ieng Sary—Khieu Samphan group's own political line, and secondly, Beijing's projects. Briefly, it could be said that the Pol Pot group is made up of adventurists with a mixture of ideas, leftist and nationalist, often lunatic; the political support and material aid of Beijing unfortunately gave them the means to put their disastrous program into action. This group dreamed of:

— reforming the great Angkor Empire, taking back from Viet Nam the entire lower Mekong delta, including Ho Chi Minh city;
— carrying out a radical revolution, suppressing in the most brutal way everything which they believed to be the curses of the old society (money, commerce, the arts, religion, science, etc.) which led to the massacre of intellectuals, Buddhist monks, artists and even sportsmen.

To realise these visions they had to raise a large army and force the entire population to work day and night on huge projects, mostly irrigation; anyone who opposed this crazy policy was mercilessly done to death.

For Beijing, the Pol Pot clique was an instrument for attacking Viet Nam from the south and thus facilitating a Chinese attack on the northern border. A firm hold over the Pol Pot regime, plus the crushing of Viet Nam, would allow Beijing to establish its domination over the whole of Indochina, and thence to advance towards all Southeast Asia where 20 million Chinese already hold important economic positions. In 1975, Pol Pot possessed six divisions of 5-6,000 men each, with no artillery, armour nor aircraft. Beijing furnished arms and advisers to bring this army up to 23 divisions, providing it with heavy armaments and aeroplanes.

One can see why from May 1975 Pol Pot began to launch the first attacks on Viet Nam and why for four years he consistently refused all offers of negotiations made by the Vietnamese. Certain of Chinese support, he believed he could defeat Viet Nam.

The events of January 1979 are easy to explain: in December 1978 after the great floods which had ravaged our country, Beijing thought that Viet Nam was completely worn out and set the Pol Pot troops at the attack, while Chinese troops were being concentrated at Viet Nam's northern border. The Pol Pot attack would oblige the Vietnamese forces to look to the south and give Beijing a pretext to attack Viet Nam on the northern border. Deng Xiaoping received Washington's sanction for this. Both Beijing and Washington underestimated the strength of internal opposition to Pol Pot and the vitality of the Vietnamese revolutionary movement.

Some would reproach you for your alliance with the Soviet Union, your membership of Comecon. Perhaps China would not have attacked you...

Imperial China attacked us frequently over the centuries. France attacked us in the 19th century, although the Soviet Union did not yet exist. The USA attacked us although we had not yet signed a treaty of friendship and cooperation with the USSR and were not yet in Comecon.

Our alliance with the USSR and our membership of Comecon are the logical and necessary consequences of the general line which our people and our Party have followed for the last 50 years. In the long and arduous struggle that we have been leading against the imperialist and reactionary forces, the revolutionary and progressive forces of the entire world have been our most precious allies. The Soviet Union has since its birth constituted the strongest support for the liberation movements of colonised peoples. Today, not only for Viet Nam, but also for Cuba, for Angola, for Afghanistan, and for all the other peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America, the existence of the Soviet Union and other industrially developed socialist countries, allows underdeveloped countries like Viet Nam to skip the
stage of capitalist development and go directly to socialism. Material and technical aid and economic and scientific cooperation with the developed socialist countries are decisive factors for the modernisation of our economy. We entertain economic relations with many capitalist countries, but these economic relations are subject to the fluctuations of the market and to the more or less hostile policy of the governments. It is only in promoting organic cooperation with the developed socialist countries that we can build up our economy. The treaty of friendship and co-operation with the USSR and our membership of Comecon have therefore reinforced our national independence, politically as well as economically. These links don’t prevent us from having the most friendly relations with other countries like India, Algeria, Mexico, etc.

Is this an abandonment of the former policy of maintaining a balance which Viet Nam followed for many years, remaining linked to both the USSR and China?

Between the two partners, China and Viet Nam, which is it that has changed “in its heart and in its guts”, as we say in Vietnamese? As long as the Beijing government was following a policy of anti-imperialism in foreign affairs and a policy of real aid to our country, we had fraternal relations with China, just as we did with the Soviet Union. We hoped for a long time that the disagreements between the two big socialist countries would eventually be settled. Unfortunately, the Chinese leaders gradually moved on to a policy of collusion with imperialism on the one hand, and on the other hand, hostility followed by aggression towards us and towards the socialist countries and the progressive forces of the whole world. So we can’t stay half-way between the Chinese and Soviet positions. Quite independently, we took up a position which accords with our national interests and with those of the world revolutionary movement, a position which is in contradiction with that of Beijing, not because the latter is Chinese, but because it is reactionary.

Some think that the Beijing leaders are, however, still revolutionaries and that their alliance with Washington is only a tactical one.

A revolutionary power can follow a policy of temporary compromise with imperialism in order to avoid adventurism, but not a policy of systematic alliance in every domain, as the leaders in Beijing are doing today. Communists in some country or other can formulate reserves or criticisms of certain aspects of the policies of other countries, but not affirm that these countries are the bitterest enemies of humanity, the first to be struggled against, who must be punished. This sort of foreign policy is a truly reactionary one: there is nothing communist about it and it is indicative of home policy too.

In the face of the Washington—Beijing axis, isn’t Viet Nam’s position particularly difficult?

We don’t hide the difficulties. But as we say in Viet Nam, Beijing and Washington may sleep in the same bed, but each has its own dreams. Washington is looking for a market, raw materials and Chinese mercenaries to fight the USSR and the Asian revolutionary movements. Beijing is looking for American aid to increase its own power, while at the same time pushing the USA to war against the USSR, which would be China’s opportunity to rise from the ruins of the two greats as the world’s most powerful nation. From 1972 to 1975 we fought the military might of America with Beijing’s political support; today we face the threat of an eventual armed aggression by China, which enjoys the support of Washington. But the Washington-Beijing alliance is rent by contradictions. We won in 1975 and again in 1979.

How would you assess the present situation between China and Viet Nam?

Large numbers of Chinese troops are being concentrated at our northern border. Every day commandos make incursions into our territory, carrying out sabotage, kidnapping or assassinating local people and officials. Politically, as either side of the border is inhabited by the same montagnard ethnic groups, Nung, Hmong, Zao..., the Chinese authorities are trying to regroup these peoples in order to set them against our government. On the sea, from the border down to Da Nang, Chinese naval units provoke incidents from time to time.

At the negotiating table, we have made concrete proposals: the withdrawal of troops
to a fair distance either side of the frontier, establishment of a demilitarised zone with a joint control commission, negotiation on the recommencement of normal relations between the two countries. The Beijing side has laid down the precondition that the Vietnamese government change its policy towards Kampuchea and the Soviet Union and recognise Chinese sovereignty over the Hoang Sa islands (Paracels). It's not a negotiating point, it's a diktat, and it's not for China to dictate our foreign policy. The Chinese leaders have spoken openly on several occasions of inflicting a second punishment upon Viet Nam. We are obliged to hold ourselves ready for any eventuality.

Let us not forget either that Beijing is putting very strong military pressure at the Laos-China border, and that all the former partisans and mercenaries of the various old pro-American parties have regrouped in China. Attempts at subversion of the present Lao government are being made in parallel with this military pressure at the borders; the possibility of an attack against Laos should not be ignored. As at the time of the fight against French and American imperialism, Viet Nam and Laos have to co-ordinate their efforts. Laos has only 3 million inhabitants in an extensive territory with very long frontiers: the Lao government called on Vietnamese forces to help it defend itself. For Vietnamese fighters and technicians, to defend Laos, and aid it in the economic and technical fields, is to defend and aid Viet Nam itself.

In the present conditions our policy is to:

— seek to negotiate, letting escape no opportunity to find a peaceful solution, accepting any compromise so long as it does not sacrifice our independence and sovereignty. We did this in 1946 and 1954 with France and in 1973 with the USA;
— if combat is forced upon us, we shall take up the challenge and fight to the end for our independence and freedom. Either they will notice in Beijing that it is impossible to crush Viet Nam and will change their policy, as happened in Paris and in Washington; or, in the long term, the Chinese people themselves will force a change of policy towards Viet Nam.