Three factors explain the recent acceleration of the Cambodian peace negotiations. A long-term factor was the world's continuing isolation of the Phnom Penh regime. Since the Vietnamese overthrow of Pol Pot's genocidal Khmer Rouge in 1979, the UN has embargoed Cambodia, trapping its people in poverty and threatening the economy with strangulation.

The USA, Australia and all other Western nations refused aid, trade and diplomatic relations with the only anti-Khmer Rouge Cambodian political force, while aiding its enemies. It was clear this policy would continue until the Khmer Rouge were brought back into the Cambodian political arena. A second, more immediate factor was the realisation that, despite this, the Cambodian government of President Heng Samrin and Prime Minister Hun Sen had the upper hand on the battlefield. The Chinese-backed Khmer Rouge were not making headway, nor were their US-backed allies.

Two years after the 1989 Vietnamese withdrawal, all 20 Cambodian provincial capitals and all but two of 100 district towns remain in Phnom Penh's hands. So do all the lowland rice-growing areas: over 90% of Cambodia's territory and population. Starting from scratch in 1979, and despite an international embargo of both countries, Vietnam has not only helped establish a Cambodian government and return the nation to near normalcy, but also trained and armed a Cambodian force to defend the country from the Khmer Rouge.

The Bangkok Post of 2 April 1991 quoted Thai military sources as saying that "the Khmer Rouge seem to be suffering far more than the Heng Samrin side since the dry season offensive began" in January. On 20 May, Post columnist Jacques Bekaert wrote that the Khmer Rouge were "fast collapsing"; "Military experts say that maybe no more than a few hundred men still obey orders. The Sihanouks...have their own trouble and probably no more than a few thousand men—at best—still under control."

The Khmer Rouge acted ominously. At a Thai border meeting reported in the Bangkok Post on 17 May, a Khmer Rouge official tried to present a moderate face, but suddenly "beat a retreat with his aides" when a second cadre arrived, "dressed in Chinese khaki army uniforms". "It was the most serious attack on a Western aid worker in 12 years of international relief work on the border", Reuter reported.

As the peace agreement approached, a Spanish aid worker was shot three miles from a UN refugee camp in northeast Thailand controlled by Khmer Rouge guerrillas. The attackers "spoke Cambodian and wore Khmer Rouge uniforms". It was the most serious attack on a Western aid worker in 12 years of international relief work on the border, Reuter reported.

On 30 September there was a coup d'etat at Site 8, a showcase Khmer Rouge camp in Thailand. The 20 'moderate' camp leaders disappeared into a Khmer Rouge prison. Five new Khmer Rouge military officers instructed the families of the disappeared to follow. They refused, but the changeover spread panic among the 44,000 refugees in the camp, who fear a forcible repatriation to Khmer Rouge zones where they face mines, malaria, and lack of rice and medicine. "This has struck the fear of God into them, like it's back to the old days," said a UN official. The UN-trained civilian police force in Site 8 was also replaced by armed Khmer Rouge soldiers. At the UN on 17 October, after a Chinese veto, the Security Council's five permanent members (the USA, the USSR, China, Britain and France) backed down from a commitment to warn the Khmer Rouge against forcibly moving refugees.

The third major ingredient in the Cambodian peace process was China's achievement of its strategic goals in countries bordering Cambodia. This allows Beijing to capitalise on its predominance in mainland Southeast Asia, and ensure the Khmer Rouge and their allies a share in Cambodia's political future—despite their comparative military weakness.

China's goals in Southeast Asia have long centred on its rivalry with Vietnam. Shunned by the United States, and abandoned by the USSR, Hanoi has recently been forced to turn to China. At the Vietnamese Communist Party Congress in June 1991, Hanoi acceded to China's demand for the head of reformist Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach. Hanoi was finally forced to remove him because of his inability to deliver the needed diplomatic reconciliation with the USA. The USA had continually spurned Vietnamese overtures and concessions such as the Cambodian withdrawal, and Beijing reaped the reward.

Soviet aid to Vietnam has also been drastically reduced. The August coup attempt and its aftermath in Moscow was a blow to reform communists in Vietnam who found themselves overruled by hardliners now looking to China as a necessary ally. China's relations with Vietnam, and with Laos, have been patched up by the military. The February 1991 coup in Thailand against the elected Chathchai government was welcomed by China as "cor-
rect and just”. China has developed a
close relationship with the Thai army;
for a decade its aid to the Khmer Rouge has travelled via Thailand.
In April the new strongman in
Bangkok, Army Commander Suchinda Krapayoon, told a US senator he
considered Pol Pot a “nice guy”, just
as in 1985 the foreign minister of the previous dictatorship had described
Pol Pot’s deputy, Son Sen, as “a very
good man”.
Last May the new Thai PM, Anand
Panyarachun, pointedly told Khmer Rouge leader Khieu Samphan: “Six
teen years ago, I was also accused of being a communist and now they
have picked me as prime minister. In
any society there are always
hardliners and softliners, and society
changes its attitude to them as time
passes by.” Pol Pot himself met with
Suchinda just before the June 1991
Cambodian negotiating session in
Thailand, where Pol Pot played a
backroom role.
With arms purchases of US$283 mil
lion between 1985 and 1989, Bangkok
ranked sixth among China’s clients for
major weapons. Burma, the other
state quick to recognise the overthrow
of Thai democracy, is also high on the
list of China’s arms customers. Bur-
mese dictator General Saw Maung
visited Beijing in August. The Far Eastern Economic Review reports that China
has become “Burma’s most important
trade partner”, while Burma is
“China’s chief foreign market for
cheap consumer goods”.
China has replaced its former policy
of party-to-party relations with
Southeast Asian insurgents with
army-to-army relations with govern-
ments. Beijing is now in a stronger
geopolitical position than ever before.
Its main rival is Tokyo. Japan’s role in
the Cambodian peace process in 1990-
91 at times threatened to sideline the
Khmer Rouge. China’s new, flexible
posture aims to prevent that, and to
broker the negotiations itself.
This interplay of factors has forced
some departures from the 1990 UN Peace Plan for Cambodia. Firstly, a
ceasefire was observed by all non-
Khmer Rouge forces from 1 May, defy-
ing US opposition to such a
step-by-step approach. Secondly, in-
stead of being totally demobilised, the
Phnom Penh army has been allowed
to retain its relative numerical
predominance. However, this does
not take account of Khmer Rouge
troops and arms caches hidden from
UN view in remote areas.
The compromise voting system for the
1993 elections, to be based on propor-
tional representation in each of 20
provinces, will make it harder for the
Khmer Rouge to win seats in the new
National Assembly than the national
proportional system originally
planned. But there is little sign of UN
preparedness to prevent intimidation
of voters and the stuffing of ballot
boxes in remote areas controlled by
the Khmer Rouge. The Khmer Rouge
could win at least some seats, and regain a role in Cambodia’s govern-
ment if their allies emerge with a
plurality of votes. Further, Hun Sen
was obliged to drop his demand that
the peace agreement provide for a
genocide trial of the Pol Pot leader-
ship. The UN has legitimised the
Khmer Rouge as a political force, al-
lowing it to establish an office in
Phnom Penh and to appoint the
onetime president and deputy prime
minister of the Pol Pot regime (Khieu
Samphan and Son Sen) as members of
the Supreme National Council, which
embodies Cambodian sovereignty.
The country faces several more years
of living dangerously.
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Came to Power (1985).
Those who read the past solely through the politics of the present inevitably fail to recognise the rich diversity of the tradition that they inherit, as well as the authenticity within it of views that they disfavour. Yet the Jewish tradition has always been a pluralistic one, comprising variants that have advanced no political agenda and others that have pursued a variety of political projects, both Left and Right, religious and secular. Zionism, too, throughout its own history has comprised various trends—including that of Zionism's own secular saint, Martin Buber, and his Ichud group—that sought some mutually acceptable conciliation with the Palestinians as the indispensable precondition of Zionism's own political and moral success.

Seeing the Palestine of his time as a "land of two peoples", Buber further argued that, if the basis of such conciliation did not already exist—even if no Palestinian partners for dialogue had emerged—it was up to Zionism, on both moral and pragmatic grounds, to take the first step: to attempt to establish the conditions under which conciliation might become possible. There is, of course, a risk in making overtures of the kind urged by Buber. But for Israel the cost of not trying is even greater, and ever growing.

The cost of Israel's failure to respond adequately to the overtures made by a variety of Palestinians eager to open up such discussions, has been enormous. Those who have displayed the considerable courage to call for steps toward mutual Israeli-Palestinian recognition—have been dismissed as insincere, or insufficiently representative of their people, or as insufficiently supported by them. What these prospective Palestinian interlocutors need and have never received is the response of interest and acceptance that would make their position credible among their own people.

How is conciliation of the kind urged by Buber to be attained in our time, and what is its essential precondition? What is required is something that may be extremely difficult to achieve, but which is very simple in conception: Israelis must begin to recognise, together and on a par with their own, the case for Palestinian peoplehood; they must consider and ultimately accept the case for Palestinian statehood. So long as the Palestinians are denied that recognition, there is no basis upon which Israel may expect them to enter with it in the construction of any common peaceful future.

However utopian it may seem, the moral idealism of Martin Buber's position is nonetheless compelling. But, for those who argue that Jews and/or Israelis cannot now afford the risks of being principled, even out of self-interest, let us shift the grounds of argument from those of principled idealism to those of direct, unadorned realism.

Elemental realism tells us that if peace is to be made, then it can only be made with one's adversaries. There is here a dual emphasis: first, with one's adversaries—i.e., with the Palestinians themselves and not (as on the Camp David route) with or through the Jordanians, the Egyptians, the United States, or anyone else; and second, with one's adversaries—with their consent, their active co-operation, their wholehearted participation.

Peace can only be made under conditions which embody the recognition that each party is an equal. Since 1988 there have been and, despite awesome reversals, still are, elements on both sides who are not only prepared but eager to do just this, although they do not currently set the agenda on either side.

It is a sad although understandable indication of a certain collective psychology when people, because of its mere certitude, find preferable the stark clarity of a situation that holds out no long-term positive prospects to the indeterminacy of a situation in which there is nonetheless the possibility of hope, change, and even peace.

In the one land of two peoples, in sum, there have emerged, like it or not, two authentic local nationalisms and now even two contending nations: the one shaped by its project of return from exile and persecution to an ancestral Biblical home, the other born of its experience of Ottoman overrule and neglect, British mandatory government, emergent Israeli statehood, Arab military defeat, and subsequent abandonment amidst the unedifying balance-of-power scramble of Arab international politics.

To deny (as Yitzhak Shamir again has at Madrid) the Palestinians' entitlement to nationhood while asserting Israel's, to base the overcoming of one's own homelessness on that of another people, is, in Israeli author Amos Oz's telling phrase, simply "moral autism". The state of Israel rests upon a certain logic, that of the entitlement of peoples, in a world of nation-states, to statehood, and it is a logic which cannot be applied selectively.

But if Israel is to deal with the Palestinians, does that mean dealing with the PLO—or has the PLO so "thoroughly discredited" itself as to be no longer a possible interlocutor? The answer to that question is, ultimately, not Israel's to decide. Israel, if it wants to explore conciliation, must deal with whomsoever the Palestinians choose as their national representatives.

Events of recent months have only served to consolidate the relationship between the PLO and the Palestinian people. Indeed, the Gulf War and the Baker initiative leading to Madrid seem to have enhanced the PLO's...
prospects of survival. Whatever misgivings they may harbour concerning the PLO, most Palestinians will continue to uphold it so long as it remains the most effective vehicle of public expression available to them. Any alternative Palestinian leadership that may emerge and prove capable of winning widespread popular support is likely to be far less tractable to Israel than the PLO. This is a reality that Israel, as it seeks to prepare some reasonable basis for its own future, will have to accept.

The alternative, the creeping de facto annexation of the West Bank simply removes the basis for any possible future accommodation with a sovereign Palestinian people in a West Bank state alongside Israel. However appealing it may be to some, this scenario of displacing Palestinian national political aspirations eastwards into the so-called 'Jordan is Palestine' option, while removing any possible basis for in situ Israeli-Palestinian national reconciliation, is likely to prove disastrous.

What is involved here, is not (as some like to describe it) the challenge of reaching a 'land-for-peace' trade-off. It is not a case of each side needing something that it lacks but which the other side has.

Both sides, even if for quite different reasons and coming via quite contrasting routes, are after the same thing. Each needs the other's recognition of the historically grounded legitimacy of its national identity and rights. So long as acceptance of this fact is not the basis from which both sides enter into detailed substantive negotiations, there is no prospect of any enduring conciliation of the differences between them.

This need for mutual recognition is something that the Palestinians—speaking through the PLO—have at least declared a willingness to concede. They have announced a readiness to accept the legitimacy of Israel's national existence, asking only the same in return for themselves.

This is something that Israel has thus far insistently refused even to contemplate. That refusal, the only position from which—it has consistently declared—it is ready to negotiate anything whatever may well doom the Madrid conference and the Baker démarche generally.

While some within Shamir's Likud government may be content with an outcome, any continuing refusal to accept the reality of the Palestinian national experience is likely to prove far costlier than all the combined risks and consequences of accommodation. And the more belated and grudging such recognition is, the less Israel will get in return from the Palestinians (and the international community) for it.

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A Democrat Story

What is going on inside the Democrats? In the last few months Australia's third political party has been a hotbed of political intrigue with gameplaying, backstabbing, musical chairs, resignations and, more recently, sackings showing worrying similarities to the goings-on of its larger counterparts.

Little more than a year since she replaced Janine Haines as leader, Janet Powell was herself deposed after a relationship with colleague Sid Spindler turned sour and was exposed to public view. Questions over the subsequent scramble for leadership culminated in Senator Paul McLean resigning in disgust from the Senate and his more conservative opponent John Coulter from South Australia getting the nod. Just weeks later it was revealed that Haines was considering standing for party president, a job she is almost guaranteed to win if she chooses to make a comeback into the federal political arena.

The fallout from the last few months of internal upheaval has certainly taken a toll on the Democrats. A popularity drop in the polls provides some outward evidence, and the party faithful are in damage control mode,
talking about ‘the need to put the leadership battle behind us’. This was not helped in early November, when allegations of financial mismanagement within the NSW branch of the Democrats led to the expulsion of two of the party’s most senior members.

What will a leadership change do for the Democrats? So far it is hard to determine any overall benefits. By all accounts policy direction has not greatly changed. Coulter, despite his avowed environmental focus, is committed to existing policy lines, largely to try to shift the terms of the economic debate and to place the spotlight on environmentally sustainable development. But this is not a philosophical shift for the Democrats. What has changed, say Coulter’s colleagues, is the style of leadership.

Karin Sowada, McLean’s replacement, and the newest Senator on the block admits leadership style has been an underlying problem for the party. She believes Coulter is attempting a different style, to put into practice the principle of ‘first among equals’. This is a strong contrast to the presidential leadership style common to most other Australian political parties. But will it work?

Coulter faces some tough challenges. Number one would be to pull the party back together and quell internal unrest. Just as important, say his colleagues, is to convince a suspicious general public to jump the credibility gap that still yawns between the Democrats’ environmental focus and the ‘economic rationalism’ still dominant in the mainstream arena. Can it be done? Sowada and others believe there has already been a shift in credibility in the Democrats’ favour—achieved not so much by their own efforts but by the distinct movement of Labor and the Liberals to the Right. And despite the recent troubles, it could be argued that the Democrats are making more of an impact these days in some states. They have certainly been pivotal in blocking key industrial relations legislation in the NSW Upper House. And Karin Sowada, in one of her first duties as Senator, made an historic speech to the ACTU Congress in September, the first Democrat and the first woman to address the peak trade union forum.

Sowada agrees it was a significant moment for the Democrats in a wider recognition of trade union issues as social justice issues. But she argues the Democrats are not drawing politically closer to the trade union movement. “Rather, the trade union movement is taking us more seriously because of our involvement with the NSW and federal industrial relations legislation”.

Another major issue that faces the Democrats right now is its relationship with green movements in different states. Members are currently being balloted on their preference for closer working relationships with green groups in at least two states, Tasmania and Victoria. Because of the fragmentation of green groups in Australia, those links will be slower to forge in NSW, South Australia and Western Australia.

Although members will have the final say, it looks certain that ties will be forged. For the Greens the connection will provide “an environmental bridgehead into parliament”. For the Democrats it represents, they hope, greater links with grassroots organisations.

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Exhausted

A group of five women sits in the shade of a battered lorry in a church compound in Maputo. Four of the five have their heads bandaged and the dirty patches of gauze are seeping blood. What happened? But as you ask the question of a young pastor, you already know the answer. “They were brought in here a week ago after their houses were attacked by a gang of men in unidentifiable camouflage uniforms.” He sighs, shrugging in the universal way of people when there’s nothing they can say or do.

“They were all raped—maybe 10 or 12 times—and these four had their lips, noses and ears cut off. They ran away in the night and they were brought to Maputo. Some of the other women from their barrio (suburb) had their breasts cut off. They may have died.”

The pastor is asked if the Mozambique National Resistance (MNR, or Renamo in Portuguese) were responsible. “Probably, that’s what they do to women, but we don’t know any more. All we want in Mozambique is peace, just peace—not even food. We need to end the fighting, I don’t think people even care who wins, just so long as the violence ends.” Mozambique is in a desperate search for a peacemaker as the nightmare of violence, death and destruction continues unabated.

I spoke to a middle-aged teacher, a white Mozambican who stayed here when many fled to Portugal or South Africa after independence was won by Frelimo in 1975. He earns the equivalent of perhaps $400 a month and is deeply committed to his country. “I never joined the party [Frelimo, the ruling party] but I believed in what it tried to do with health and education.

Why would I go? It’s my home.” He fears that Maputo, long an island of safety in a sea of destruction, could soon share the fate of the long-suffering rural population. “This place could explode. It’s only kept alive by
foreign aid money.” He lists the problems like a litany. Soviet military aid is drying up, so the army is running out of parts for its vehicles, helicopters and Antonov transport planes. 30% of incoming goods are pilfered at the ports by desperate workers to sell in exchange for food. Frelimo simply hasn’t the resources to prosecute a bush war, feed half the population, maintain law and order, and rebuild a completely shattered economy.

Mozambique, according to the World Bank, is the world’s poorest, hungriest, most indebted, most aid-dependent country. The war has cost almost US$20 billion and the government has been reduced to begging status, seeking crumbs at the international table. Almost ten million people require some form of food aid.

The US State Department estimates over 200,000 people have been killed by Renamo, another 200,000 over the age of five are dead from malnutrition caused by the war, and a mind-numbing 500,000 under five have died from direct causes of the war. The statistics themselves are exhausting. Half the rural primary schools have been destroyed, almost the same number of health posts. Teachers and health workers are primary targets, many killed, tortured and kidnapped.

In Maputo, where foreigners from a plethora of donor agencies call the shots from opulent, heavily guarded villas, there are two cities. One is the concrete city, the other the reed city. In the former, a tattered remnant can still be seen of its colonial glory as a corrupt playground stretching along the white beaches of the Indian Ocean. The beautiful buildings are faded and often windowless, but the shops are full.

You can buy anything if you have rands or dollars. “You want a gun, we get it. An AK47? Okay.” ‘Red Star’ market is like an oriental bazaar in the middle of a dilapidated African city. Refrigerators, computers, stereos, television sets line the crumbling sidewalks. Cases of 20 year old Scotch are piled up beside mountains of tinned Coke. The prices are great for foreigners and for Mozambicans working for aid agencies who have hard currency. All of the goods come from South Africa.

The other city: a decaying artificial core surrounded by fetid, squalid reed huts. No one knows how many. The population of Maputo has doubled in ten years with people fleing the insecure rural areas. An infrastructure for 500,000 is trying to support perhaps 1.5 million.

Thousands of street kids sell cigarettes or guard cars, women sell small mounds of tomatoes and cabbages, workers walk many kilometres to save a few cents. 50% live in absolute poverty. Many cannot afford to buy water, washing their clothes in stinking pools and drains. Once one of the safest cities in Africa, Maputo is imploding under a violent crime wave. A gruesome form of ‘necklacing’ takes the lives of dozens, as suspected criminals and Renamo bandidos are forced to drink petrol and then set alight.

Innocent people, along with hardened criminals, are victims. The police stand by, apparently helpless to stop the frustrated poor—or perhaps, as the residents of slums charge, they are accomplices who rent out their weapons by night to marauding gangs looting under cover of darkness.

Economic hardship is blamed on the hated PRE, the Economic Recovery Program imposed by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. It has squeezed the urban and rural poor with price increases far above wages, leading to strikes, crime and real hunger. Peace, the young pastor says, is the solution. Almost every Mozambican would agree. But the outlook is bleak. The eight rounds of peace talks in Rome have seen little progress.

Renamo, outmanoeuvred by President Joaquim Chissano’s swift moves towards a free market and multi-party democracy, can only stall, hoping that Frelimo will soon collapse. Because of its extreme brutality, Renamo knows it cannot win an election. Afonso Dhlakama, Renamo’s leader, and his entourage of Kenyan, Malawian, South African and American advisers, lack the intellectual and psychological makeup to participate in a protracted negotiating process and so return to violence.

Paradoxically, says a Canadian diplomat, while destabilisation and violence were engineered from outside by South African support for Renamo—which continues to this day—it has now gained a life of its own. The continued devastation and misery results in growing political instability, a decline in administrative competence, loss of control of security forces and police, and a corrupting of national institutions. The diplomat fears the country could degenerate further into a division between ‘competing warlords’.

Robert Davies of the Centre for Southern African Studies at the University of the Western Cape in South Africa and a long-time Mozambican observer, makes four proposals for a peace process in a recently released paper:

* The present and past supporters of Renamo must be pressured to use their influence to bring the rebels to a rapid ceasefire agreement. In particular, South Africa’s pretensions to becoming a democratic, multi-racial nation respected in the international community will remain in serious doubt if it continues to support Renamo, however covertly.

* The call by Nelson Mandela in 1990 for legislation to make support for Renamo a punishable offence needs to be acted upon. This would create a climate depriving Renamo of military support, forcing it closer to a ceasefire.

* Long-term guarantees against future external support for violent conflict in Mozambique must be put in place. Davies suggests the United Nations could play such a role.

* A regional and international campaign needs to be mounted to secure support for a program of social and economic reconstruction in Mozambique, to be in place as soon as a ceasefire is realised.

Mozambique is exhausted. Its people are being assaulted by forces beyond their control, forces unleashed against them from another era of Cold War politics and regional destabilisation. They want only to live without fear and in peace. The world owes them that much.

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