

**Ben Kiernan**

## 4. Cleaning the Frontiers

Utdrag ur Ben Kiernans bok *The Pol Pot Regime*, s 111-125

Kiernan ger en ganska utförlig redovisning av gränskonflikten som blossade upp mellan Pol Pots Kampuchea och Vietnam redan 1975. Den bör jämföras med andra beskrivningar av denna konflikt, t ex den betydligt mer kortfattade (och mer Kampuchea-orienterade) beskrivningen i Philip Shorts bok *Pol Pot – The History of a Nightmare*, kapitel 11, ”Stalin’s Microbes” [Stalins mikrober]. Detta kommer att publiceras på marxistarkivet i svensk översättning.

Allra sist nedan, efter själva texten, återges några kartor som rör gränskonflikten.

...

### ***The May 1976 Negotiations***

The negotiations foundered on the “Brevié Line,” a subject of much misunderstanding. In 1939 the French governor-general of Indochina, Jules Brevié, had determined administrative and police boundaries between the French protectorate of Cambodia and the colony of Cochinchina (southern Vietnam). The land border was fairly clear, but no sea boundary had ever been demarcated. Brevié did not create one, but he drew a line from the sea coast at an angle of 140 degrees out into the Gulf of Siam, deviating north to skirt the large Vietnamese island of Phu Quoc. Islands south of this line were to be under the administrative and police control of southern Vietnam; those north of it, under Cambodian control. But Brevié dodged the issue of sovereignty: “The question of whose territory these islands are remains outstanding.” Even further from resolution was the question of ownership of the seas between the islands on both sides of the line.<sup>56</sup> A secret 1977 DK foreign ministry document conceded the point: “This border was of an 'administrative' character, but Democratic Kampuchea considers it as the state border between Kampuchea and Vietnam which was left by history.”<sup>57</sup>

In 1967, the Vietnamese communists had recognized Cambodia's “existing borders.” But no sea border, delimiting territorial waters, was included in this agreement.<sup>58</sup> In June 1977, Vietnamese deputy foreign minister Phien Hien was asked whether Hanoi had accepted the Brevié Line. He responded: “Yes, we did, but at the time we agreed to the Brevié Line, we were not aware of problems of territorial waters, continental shelf, etc.—those new phenomena.”<sup>59</sup> This constituted an admission that in 1967 Hanoi had agreed to use the Brevié

<sup>56</sup> Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, pp. 32-33. See the text of Brevié's decision in *Kampuchea Dossier*, I, Hanoi 1978, pp. 139-41.

<sup>57</sup> “Provatt prumdaen Kampuchea-Vietnam” (“The History of the Kampuchea-Vietnam Border”), Foreign Ministry of Democratic Kampuchea, Internal Document, 15-6-1977, 5th copy, p. 16.

<sup>58</sup> The agreement is reproduced in S. Heder, “Kampuchea's Armed Struggle,” *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* (henceforth *BCAS*), 11, 1, 1979, p. 24. Heder wrongly suggests the Vietnamese had recognized the Brevié Line in 1967 because it was “the only 'existing' maritime frontier” (in Elliott, ed., *The Third Indochina Conflict*, p. 26). It was not a frontier at all, and there was no maritime frontier at the time. Cambodian diplomat Sarin Chhak wrote in 1965, in a book endorsed by a preface from Sihanouk, “The measure taken concerns only the administration. As for the question of sovereignty, it was reserved. But if it was reserved, this does not mean that any advantage was already presumed for one country or the other. It was in suspension, totally in suspension.” Chhak claimed to have demonstrated that “the islands of the Gulf of Siam have always been Cambodian, even those which were only administratively connected to Vietnam by the Brevié note and in particular the island of Phu Quoc” (S. Chhak, *Les Frontières du Cambodge*, Paris: Dalloz, 1966, pp. 158-59). In other words, Cambodia still claimed the islands south of the Brevié Line, which it neither recognized nor claimed as a national border.

<sup>59</sup> Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, p. 33.

Line to demarcate sovereignty over the islands. But there is no evidence to contradict Phan Hien or to indicate that the question of “territorial waters” even came up in 1967. It remained to be negotiated.<sup>60</sup> Sihanouk's Cambodia never claimed the Brevié Line, even with respect to sovereignty over the islands. In 1969, significantly, Sihanouk had declined to acknowledge the line, still hoping to get additional islands to its south.<sup>61</sup> His regime and, from 1970, Lon Nol's Khmer Republic both patrolled sea borders with South Vietnam that fell far short of the Brevié Line.<sup>62</sup> Thus, there had never been an agreement. Hanoi's 1967 offer to Cambodia vis-à-vis sovereignty over the islands did not amount to a proposed sea border, matched no Cambodian claim, was not acknowledged by Phnom Penh, and was never published or documented by either side. So in 1976, when Democratic Kampuchea claimed the Brevié Line as the nonnegotiable sea border, the Vietnamese insisted on negotiating the border. Democratic Kampuchea claimed Hanoi was backtracking. It refused to parley. The talks were doomed.

Yet Pham Van Ba, who participated in the negotiations on the Vietnamese side, recalls the May 1976 meetings as “rather positive.” Deputy foreign minister Phan Hien headed the Vietnamese delegation. A Khmer-speaking delegation member, Kieu Minh, agrees that the negotiations proceeded for two weeks in a “reasonably amicable” atmosphere.<sup>63</sup> The Cambodian team was headed by Ney Sarann, former C PK secretary of the Northeast Zone (see Chapter 3), whom Ba describes as “neither distrustful nor generous,” a stance he found “normal” for such negotiations.<sup>64</sup> The two had known each other as anti-French fighters in the early 1950s. Ba even knew Pol Pot, having once smuggled him into Phnom Penh, disguised as his own aide-de-camp, at the war's end in 1954. From 1975 to 1977 Ba served as Hanoi's ambassador in the Cambodian capital. On several occasions he met Pol Pot, who addressed Ba as “comrade.”

Neither Pol Pot nor DK foreign minister Ieng Sary participated in the talks. But the three Zones bordering Vietnam were all represented. Sarann, from the Northeast, had a number two, Chan (Seng Hong), the new deputy secretary of the Eastern Zone. Kang Chap from the Southwest completed the delegation. Chap, “a soldier slightly over 40 years of age, who wears black pajamas,”<sup>65</sup> was rising fast in Democratic Kampuchea. He had recently been named president of the national “Judiciary Committee.” The delegation's secretaries, Keat Chhon and Touch Khamdoeun, were intellectuals.

---

<sup>60</sup> A precise map on the cover of *Democratic Kampuchea's Phumisas Kampuchea Pracheathipathaiy (Geography of Democratic Kampuchea)*, the “first edition” of a “first grade” text published by the DK “Education Ministry” dated 1976, shows Cambodia without a sea border. Only in August 1977 did Democratic Kampuchea produce a map (unilaterally) claiming the Brevié Line as the sea border (*Democratic Kampuchea Is Moving Forward*, Phnom Penh, August 1977).

<sup>61</sup> S. Heder, “The Kampuchean-Vietnamese Conflict,” in Elliott, ed., *The Third Indochina Conflict*, p. 26. Heder reveals that in 1969, “Sihanouk instructed his cartographers to ... omit the Brevié line. Sihanouk apparently hoped to renew Kampuchea's historical claims on several small and more distant islands south of the Brevié line at some future point, and wanted to leave the maritime situation ambiguous in order not to rule out such claims.” In 1977, a DK foreign ministry document asserted that as a result of Brevié's 1939 decision, “Kampuchea lost a number of its islands, especially Koh Tral [Phu Quoc].” “The History of the Kampuchea-Vietnam Border,” Foreign Ministry of Democratic Kampuchea, Internal Document, 15-61977, 5th copy, p. 6.

<sup>62</sup> See the map dated 14 November 1973, from the archives of the Saigon navy, in *Kampuchea Dossier*, Hanoi, 1978, p. 142. [ ingår i bildbilagan nedan ]

<sup>63</sup> Author's interview with Kieu Minh, Phnom Penh, 22 October 1980. When asked, Minh conceded that Sihanouk's former diplomat Sarin Chhak, a specialist on Cambodia's borders, “might have been behind the scenes.” The Vietnamese side seemed to fear manipulation. Pham Van Ba says that “Ieng Sary was really controlling the negotiations,” though the DK foreign minister was not present, “and I saw the hand of the Chinese preventing a reconciliation”

<sup>64</sup> Author's interview with Pham Van Ba, Ho Chi Minh City, 28 October 1980.

<sup>65</sup> “Life in Southern Cambodia,” Extracts from an Airgram Report by an Officer of the American Embassy at Bangkok, 25 January 1977 (declassified in 1978), p. 3.

In a 1978 interview, Phan Hien recalled that “the Vietnamese proposed to use the last French map before 1954” to demarcate the land border. But Democratic Kampuchea “would agree only to use the map as the basis for discussion, demanding the right to make some amendments.” Hien claimed the Cambodians then “refused to specify in advance all the changes they wished to make, offering only one or two examples.”<sup>66</sup> Hanoi politburo member Xuan Thuy has said, however, that Democratic Kampuchea proposed eleven specific changes.<sup>67</sup> Pham Van Ba claimed that the issue was resolved anyway: “We all agreed to cede territory to the other side if there was a majority of the other's race living there.” Ba was quick to point out that this did not involve large tracts of territory like “Kampuchea Krom,” which Democratic Kampuchea ostensibly did not claim. The agreement applied only to discrepancies along the land border. Nevertheless, Ba adds, “we thought this was positive, and took into account the local people's interests. This was the principle; it showed mutual goodwill, though it could only be worked out in practice in actual negotiations to be held later.”<sup>68</sup> If true, this was a Vietnamese concession, because the CPK had already expelled or dispersed all concentrations of Vietnamese residents that might have allowed Hanoi to now claim border readjustments in its favor. Khmer populations remained along the Vietnamese side of the border.

According to Kieu Minh, the “one or two bitter words” that were exchanged concerned the sea border. The Vietnamese, he said, acknowledged the Brevié Line only insofar as it determined ownership of islands, “since for navigation purposes the line did not allow enough water to the Vietnamese around Phu Quoc.”<sup>69</sup> There was no compelling technical reason to rule out a compromise. But politics intervened. The record of the CPK Standing Committee's discussion of the issue, during the afternoon and evening of 14 May 1976, not only reveals that the Vietnamese reports of the negotiations are substantially accurate, but also shows how the Cambodian side decided to break off the talks after five meetings, thus canceling the June summit with Vietnam.

### ***The Transcripts of Conflict***

Here is what happened.<sup>70</sup> Ney Sarann opened the Standing Committee meeting with a report on Vietnam's position. He paraphrased Phan Hien's assertions that morning: that Cambodian troops had recently attacked Vietnamese territory, that the Brevié Line was baseless, that accepting it “would infringe their sovereignty,” and that previous Vietnamese positions had “no legal meaning” without signatures. “They stressed that the sea border must be a median line to be reasonable. They said that we said that the median dividing line would leave us with no room to get out. They said that there would be no problem with that; once the border is set there would be an agreement on movements.”

Sarann commented: “They tried to keep the atmosphere happy. But . . . because the gist of the declarations was weighty, the situation was rather tense, though there were no clashes.”

Sarann then summarized his own response to Hien. First, he had claimed that the Brevié Line was “unquestionable because the French drew the line and it had been respected since then.” Second, Sarann had asserted that “half each is not just,” to which the Vietnamese “reacted quite strongly; they were not happy” Third, Sarann pointed out that with respect to the land border, the Cambodians accepted the French map only “as a document for discussion by

---

<sup>66</sup> Gareth Porter, “Vietnamese Policy and the Indochina Crisis,” in Elliott, ed., *The Third Indochina Conflict*, p. 94, based on Porter's interview with Phan Hien on 2 November 1978.

<sup>67</sup> Porter, p. 126 n. 139, citing his interview with Xuan Thuy, 2 November 1978.

<sup>68</sup> Author's interview with Pham Van Ba, 1980.

<sup>69</sup> Author's interview with Kieu Minh, 1980.

<sup>70</sup> What follows is from the minutes of the CPK Standing Committee meeting on 14 May 1976, recorded in “Examining Vietnamese Reactions.”

requesting changes at some points.” Thus the Cambodian positions on the land and sea borders were contradictory. (But it was Phan Hien who, in his reply, stated that “the land map and the sea line cannot be compared with one another,” apparently meaning that no sea border existed, whereas a land border map did exist even if it had to be carefully negotiated on the ground.) Sarann concluded that “they absolutely do not recognize our Brevié line. They insist on dividing the sea in the middle.” Finally, the Vietnamese queried which land map the Cambodians were using and asked to show the Cambodian delegation a film the next evening.

Then the Standing Committee discussion commenced. First, Chan commented: “If we cannot resolve the sea border it could cause trouble in the future.” Kang Chap suggested that the Vietnamese were fishing for, if not demanding, a new Cambodian position. Then a digression occurred. Nuon Chea brought up the Vietnamese naval harassment of the four Chinese ships traversing their waters. Son Sen denied the Vietnamese charges: “They encroach into our border non-stop. We do not infringe them.” (As we have seen, his accusation was contradicted in *Tung Padevat* the next month.)

At this point, Pol Pot “asked for clarification.” He wanted to know whether the Vietnamese were willing to extend the negotiations, “not wanting to break them off yet, or do they?” This was the first suggestion of ending the talks. Pol Pot speculated that the Vietnamese negotiators may have been exceeding their instructions and fishing for a change in Cambodia's position. He asked if there had been “any interesting incidents.”

Ney Sarann replied that the Vietnamese “can extend the time and chew on it.” He repeated, “This morning the atmosphere was tense but did not reach a breakdown. . . . The two organizations [parties] will meet in June.” Sarann noted that the Vietnamese had said “whatever happens they must have our delegation visit their country,” so they could “show us around like we did them.” He concluded that “this atmosphere shows that they need us in order for us to make concessions so that they gain on the border.” Kang Chap volunteered, “Today's discussion shows that they still think they are a big country with many people; they still want to oppress us and think we are scared of them. They say we interfere with their sovereignty. They want to show off their power. But this is their method of attack, to have us look for a way out.”

Chan agreed with Sarann that the Vietnamese “do not want to break off the negotiations yet.” However, the atmosphere was worsening. “Phan Hien's expression was different, like copper. Even when he smiled it was not fresh. The reasons: 1. The events at the border. We rejected their accusations. 2. Our strong standpoint which shows that their request and the line they drew were not just.” Kang Chap, of the Southwest, was suspicious: “There are many of them; their composition is unknown. I suspect some are CIA elements. They look like cattle traders.” The discussion was careering off course. Nuon Chea now drew the conclusion that no progress was possible: “They maintain their standpoint and we maintain our standpoint.” He then focused on “the important point;’ the sea border. “Is this going to be a tough problem?;’ he asked. Such bargaining was “quite normal;’ and there had been “sea clashes before.” However, Cambodia now knew that the Vietnamese “want to divide the sea into two.” Chea asserted, “We cannot give them any concession on the sea.” This was Democratic Kampuchea's bottom line. The negotiations could be extended to discover Hanoi's. However, Chea said his priority was to maintain “the same atmosphere of solidarity and friendship” He was concerned that “if the negotiation situation stayed the same like this, the atmosphere could become tense.” Phan Hien was “not a very experienced politician” and was “playing with law, capitalist law. Negotiating with us like with the Americans.” Perhaps Hien did not understand the importance of solidarity, Chea said. “He wants to suppress us by the method of negotiations.” Therefore, even though “the negotiation today was not terribly tense,” Chea argued, “we could find ways to ease it, to stop the negotiations in order to maintain the same situation.” Accepting the status quo, an unresolved border, would be preferable to pursuing

conflicting claims.

Now Vorn Vet had his say. He said it seemed “unlikely that they will concede.” Further talk may not produce results. “It is their philosophy that they are a big country and don't want to submit to our requests.” While Cambodia wants to “defend our interest,” Vietnam “wants to profit from us.” Vet also plumbed for breaking off the talks. “So the negotiations can be postponed but [we can] maintain a stable situation, and avoid clashes in order to preserve peaceful coexistence and for us to strengthen our self-sufficiency” Nevertheless, “this is not easily done.” The future would surely bring “clashes at the border.” That prospect did not alter his recommendation.

Son Sen weighed in again, noting that “each side has an absolute standpoint.” He concurred that Vietnam wanted to keep talking: “Even though their expression was more vulgar this time, they do not want to break it off yet.” But it was a zero sum game: “If we concede and are soft, they profit from it.” Sen predicted that “we won't achieve our requests Nos. 2, 3, and 4,” which are not specified, though this suggests that Cambodia's first request, “No. 1,” was within sight of acceptance. “If the negotiations are extended, it would lead to tension. . . . I agree with comrade Nuon [Chea] that we should find some method . . . to end the negotiations by maintaining a normal atmosphere.”

Son Sen then detailed his reasons. “We have investigated carefully, and we could lose tremendously if we apply international law.” A 1969 case had decided that a country's territorial sea rights depended on the length of its coastline. “Our land is large, but with a small opening to the sea. . . . The Vietnamese and the Thai take all the sea. So we can not solve the problem with this standpoint. We postpone this problem in order to build our self-sufficiency and explain to our friends on the international stage.” Which friends? “Vietnam does not gain. If they quarrel with the Chinese it would be even more complicated.” Nuon Chea agreed that “the Vietnamese need for us has not faded, especially with the Non-Aligned Nations meeting coming up. . . . If the negotiations are postponed, we gain.” Sen again stressed the Chinese role, describing Vietnam's situation as “difficult!”

By this time, Ney Sarann must have seen the writing on the wall. He gave ground with a Maoist dismissal of the Vietnamese: “I agree with brother Nuon that they are not politicians, they are experts.” But he went over the issues again. Each side, he said, had clarified its position. “They were ambitious and wanted to achieve their request. They need us but they also want concessions from us. So far the atmosphere is still relaxed. We tried, and they also tried. They still show a happy manner.” He agreed that “if we could find a way to end it we should. . . . But as hosts, we might not profit politically if we end it. We want them to leave, . . . [but] it seems they won't be leaving easily.” Sarann's position suggested his ambivalence about forcing a break with Vietnam.

The discussions up to this point take up eight pages of the minutes. Pol Pot has said almost nothing except to introduce the idea of breaking off the negotiations. Various nuances have been expressed, and no single speaker has predominated. Pol Pot now takes over. The “Comrade Secretary” makes a speech that takes up the next eight pages. On the final (the seventeenth) page, the minutes of the meeting record a brief exchange limited to Pol Pot, Nuon Chea, and Ieng Sary —numbers one, two, and three in the CPK hierarchy. The round-table discussion ended before the meeting's halfway mark.

Pol Pot begins by stating that his view is “nothing different from what we have heard so far.” He merely wants to add something. His first point is that “negotiation with Vietnam to resolve the border problem is our current revolutionary task.” There is “a chronic conflict with Vietnam,” and “we are not idealists who say there should not be any conflict.” Pol Pot does not envision a resolution. “At present and in the future there will always be conflict. We must strengthen our standpoint. . . . In the future if we stand on this experience we can negotiate

with anybody. So it is a big lesson. . . . Even if we don't resolve the problem, we still have the experience." The purpose of negotiating is not pragmatic, but didactic. The lesson seems to be the impossibility of negotiating with Vietnam.

Second, Pol Pot discusses "more complicated" conflicts in other parts of the world. Yugoslavia and Romania have more difficulties with "Russia" than Cambodia does with Vietnam. And "the same goes for Albania," which "is in difficulties with the East as well as with the West." Yet "these countries preserve their independence," even though they are geographically "in the Russian horde." They are Slavs, and even "speak Slav," but despite its strength, "Russia can still not do anything." Now in comparison, Pol Pot continues, "We are in a better position. Our situation has improved a great deal." Moreover, Scandinavian, Southeast Asian, and African countries "also want independence." Even in the Middle East, "the U.S. and Russian imperialists are not in control." Among the nonaligned nations, the forces resisting imperialism and colonialism are "very strong." Border conflicts exist, but do not result in war, unless a state faces "internal" resistance as well. "Attacking from outside is not easy ... unless the internal force is strong enough" to support external aggression. Crushing internal opposition is an important priority.

Third, Pol Pot analyzes "the negotiation problem." It is normal, he says, for Vietnam to defend its interests. Cambodia does the same. "We give them some peel. This is where they disagree. We stand on the Brevié line to give them the peel. They draw the Phan Hien and the Viet Minh line to give us the peel. The problem is: they do not accept the Brevié line. Because if they accept that line they will have given us the core. So it is normal that they want the advantage." But normality in Pol Pot's eyes argues for ending the talks, not pursuing them with a readiness to tackle problems along the way. Normality does not apply to Cambodia; it is a feature of Vietnamese history. "We don't go back to old times. We use old documents just to maintain the existing situation. We don't claim anything new" Vietnam does. Moreover, its drive for gain is a result of normal Vietnamese actions: "In their party, they have educated their youth for a long time . . . about the concept of Indochina, the concept of the federation." Hanoi's ingrained "expansionist strategy" prevents it from accepting "our Brevié line." Vietnam, presenting itself as "a big country" to intimidate Cambodia, has "pulled a gun to threaten us."

Pol Pot advises "solving those problems that can be solved," postponing others, and telling the Vietnamese that "there have been frictions in past experience but our two parties, standing on friendship and solidarity, could always resolve problems. As for this problem, we'll definitely resolve it." This answer, he suggests, would keep Cambodia on the same level as the Vietnamese. It is a "winning" tactic. Moreover, it "conforms with our request to ease the atmosphere." Here Pol Pot presumably refers to ending negotiations, with the ostensible goal of improving relations. By contrast, he says, the Vietnamese wish to prolong the talks "so we would become bored" and "to profit from these negotiations." The Vietnamese proposal "to divide the sea equally" is "a very dumb trick."

Finally Pol Pot draws conclusions and proposes action. "We have arrived at a standstill." Further negotiations are risky because Hanoi wants concessions. "If we follow this direction we would be tricked and led into tension. It is a loss to continue. It is better to end it. But how are we going to end it? Let's discuss that." He reminds the Standing Committee that this will "only be a break," but one that will offend Hanoi. "In the future when we ask them to start negotiations they will not come again. They'll ask us to go to them" He does not point out that Democratic Kampuchea's leaders would retain the initiative only if they refuse to go.

Pol Pot's proposed method of breaking off the negotiations begins and ends with sweet talk. "In our answer the day after tomorrow, we'll stress that we stand on friendship and solidarity." Ney Sarann's delegation should say that Cambodia's relations with Vietnam "must be cared

for, enriched and further beautified” and should tell the Vietnamese that “upon this standpoint we believe that we'll definitely solve the problem.” The Cambodians should also add that “both delegations have expressed their opinions” and that “we have largely agreed on the land.” They should then announce that the Brevié Line “was drawn a long time ago in history and both sides have respected it since.” They should point out that all borders were created by the French and add that “we do not accept two lines to divide the sea and the islands. We accept only one line.” Ney Sarann should then conclude, ‘We'll report further to our Organization... . Even though we have different standpoints, I think there'll be new light after it is examined by our Party. And according to our experience, time will lead us to understand and have solidarity with each other, and we will definitely solve the problem. . . . We consider friendship and solidarity with Vietnam as our sacred object.’ In this vein, the bilateral liaison committees along the border should keep “in constant contact.” Pol Pot ended his speech: “Tell them that enemies are active. [ Say that] it could be that the enemy starts conflicts in order to destroy our negotiations.”

No dissent from Pol Pot's instructions was expressed. The only recorded comments are from Nuon Chea and Ieng Sary, who expressed concern. Nuon Chea worried, “It is possible they won't go.” They “insist” on a June summit. He thought a break could create problems, for as he admitted, “we only negotiate when they accept our points.” For his part, Ieng Sary wondered if “after a long time they might accept” the Brevié Line. Pol Pot reassured them that there was no need to continue negotiations: “I observe they are not in a better position than us.” He pointed out that clarity, moderation, reason, and gentleness characterized the Cambodian position. It did not look unfriendly. And it would do no harm, because “they need us for a summit conference,” whether in June or later. Nuon Chea was convinced. “Le Duan himself wrote twice that he wanted to meet us.... He really needs us.” The matter was resolved. Pol Pot ended the meeting, and the Cambodia-Vietnam negotiations, in perfect rectitude: “So we act kindly. Let's go and see their film. They have no reason to cut us off because we are still smiling, we have never abused them. If they cut us off they have nothing to gain, only to lose.” Cambodia was in a position of strength, and talks could be held any time. Noone present is recorded as having disputed this or argued forcefully for continuation of the meetings for any other reason. If Cambodia had a fallback position, which seems unlikely, no one present referred to it.

On 19 May, the day after the last session, Ieng Sary met with Phan Hien. Ney Sarann and the other members of the DK negotiating team were not present. After a short chat, Hien read a letter from Hanoi's foreign minister, Nguyen Duy Trinh. Trinh asked that the two countries' delegations to the August nonaligned Summit Conference in Colombo exchange views beforehand. He also suggested to Ieng Sary that Cambodia, Vietnam, and Laos consider coordinating their policies on international aid, “in order to have the best application and in order to show the Conference that the three countries are in good solidarity”.<sup>71</sup> Turning to the bilateral talks, Hien noted that Sarann had “requested a rest.” The resumption of talks was related to the date of the planned bilateral summit. Hien now offered his agreement on a break “for two weeks in order to do the necessary work.” The talks could resume on 5 or 10 June, or later, depending on the date set for the summit. Hien added, “We will call comrade Ney Sarann.”

Ieng Sary took “a little rest” before responding. He first thanked the Vietnamese delegation, “which has worked in Cambodia with good results.” Shortcomings and mix-ups were inevitable, he said, after war in each country. But the Vietnamese should consider that they

---

<sup>71</sup> “Santeneakar rebos opaneayok rottmuntrei Ieng Sary chumpouh samamett Phan Hien anurottmuntrei krosuong karboretet satheararott procheathipatheiy Vietnam thngai 19 osophea 1976” (“Conversation between Deputy Prime Minister Ieng Sary and Comrade Phan Hien, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, on 19 May 1976”), p. 4. What follows is also from these minutes.

are “visiting relatives.” The Cambodian side would “do whatever we can to further expand and strengthen solidarity.” There had been no “great result,” but “the meetings allowed us to understand each other.” Now, “we see that solidarity and friendship between the two countries is necessary”

The Cambodian side would “need time to think further.” As to Hien's suggested resumption, Sary responded with, Don't call us, we'll call you. He told Hien: “The real work is for a later date to be communicated by telegram. We'll let you know the date, the month, and the venue.” Sary likewise deferred Nguyen Duy Trinh's requests.<sup>72</sup> Sary said he feared that raising funds among the nonaligned nations for aid to Kampuchea, Vietnam, and Laos might damage nonaligned unity. “It must be done so that other countries are not jealous that our three countries are the only ones being considered.” Study was required to distinguish “good and bad outcomes.” Sary did not reveal that the CPK Standing Committee had already decided a month before to dispose of the “Indochina” notion “forever” and to find a way to “explain to the Non-Aligned Nations.”<sup>73</sup> Or that two weeks earlier it had also decided that the only initiative Democratic Kampuchea would pursue at the nonaligned meetings would be to “keep close contact with Senegal.”<sup>74</sup> The Vietnamese proposals were still-born.

According to a Vietnamese embassy official, the Cambodians asked to break off the negotiations so that they could report on the Vietnamese position to the CPK Central Committee and await its decision. No decision was ever announced.<sup>75</sup> The June summit never took place, nor did any further negotiations between Democratic Kampuchea and Vietnam. If Pol Pot ever had any intention of reopening talks, he abandoned it. But he maintained the facade of friendship for the rest of the year. Ieng Sary asked Phan Hien to send “three to five journalists and photographers from both North and South for a period of one week to ten days.” This was substantially less than the “one-month visit” decided on by the Standing Committee on 21 April. But he also invited a delegation from Air Vietnam.<sup>76</sup> Four days later Nuon Chea wrote to a Vietnamese counterpart that the May meetings had been “very successful in further consolidating and strengthening our militant solidarity” and that the two sides had been “extremely sincere with each other, as the comrades-in-arms and revolutionary brothers they are.”<sup>77</sup>

But internal DK propaganda was frank. Cadres in the border district of Kirivong (Region 13) proclaimed that Cambodia and Vietnam were “big enemies” who “could not look at each other or speak to one another.”<sup>78</sup> Once again, CPK policy in Region 13, heart of the Southwest Zone, quickly reflected that of the Center.

The Vietnam News Agency's director, Tran Thanh Xuan, had been waiting a year for permission to go to Cambodia. In July 1976, he led a delegation of journalists on a two-week visit.<sup>79</sup> In Phnom Penh they stayed near the Vietnamese embassy in a guest house whose

---

<sup>72</sup> Sary stated that diplomatic cooperation between the two countries depended on “each country to make it close.” So, he nodded vaguely, “there will be a continuous exchange of opinions as necessary.” And “we will report to the Standing Committee about the Conference in Colombo. . . . As for the big problems in the world, we are collecting more documents.”

<sup>73</sup> “Summary of Decisions Made by the Standing Committee on 19-20-21 April 1976,” p. 5.

<sup>74</sup> “Minutes of the Standing Committee Meeting on 3-5-76,” 2 pp.

<sup>75</sup> Author's interview with Kieu Minh, 1980.

<sup>76</sup> “Conversation,” 19 May 1976, p. 9.

<sup>77</sup> Letter from Nuon Chea to Pham Hung, dated 23 May 1976, quoted in *Kampuchea Dossier*, I, Hanoi 1978, pp. 130-31.

<sup>78</sup> Author's interview with a woman deported to Kirivong district in early 1976. She said the cadres made these statements in 1976. Tram Kak, 16 July 1980.

<sup>79</sup> Author's interview with Tran Thanh Xuan, Ho Chi Minh City, 26 October 1980. The following report on Xuan's visit to Cambodia is based on this interview and on Nayan Chanda's 1981 interview with Xuan, recounted in Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, p. 34.



former owner, their hosts said, had been “driven away.”<sup>80</sup> The DK minister of information, Hu Nim, officially welcomed them. Xuan recalled having met Nim in 1964, when he visited the Vietnamese capital.<sup>81</sup> Nim did not recognize him, but later mumbled, “I think I know you from somewhere.” Xuan recalls, “I could see Hu Nim had no power any more. He was not at ease; he was very friendly, but not his own master. Everything was arranged by Ieng Sary. Hu Nim just implemented it and played the official role.” The Vietnamese visited Kompong Cham, Kompong Thom, Siemreap and Angkor, and Battambang. But they were allowed to travel only on the roads, not through villages, and they were prevented from interviewing the people. “Our camera crew had great difficulty finding smiling peasants building the country. They all looked so sullen and sad,” Xuan says. “Things did not seem normal, but I did not write about that.” His report merely stated, “While the cities are empty, the people are working in the fields,” a line excised by his Hanoi editor, Hoang Tung. Xuan did not ask after Hou Yuon. “I did not want to interfere,” he says, hinting he had suspected problems. Xuan had known Ieng Sary, Khieu Samphan, and Pol Pot from their days as students in France together. When the three Cambodian leaders received him “solemnly” in Cambodia's royal palace, Khieu Samphan said to him, “We have struggled together against the United States.” Xuan got the impression that Samphan was moved to see him. Ieng Sary also hosted a reception. Xuan found them friendly and failed to distinguish any nuances in their attitudes toward Vietnam. On 20 July Pol Pot granted Xuan an interview, but he wrote the text of the interview himself. “I did not write it,” says Xuan. “I let him say what he wanted. He talked about solidarity with Vietnam as a strategic question, and also a sentiment, from the heart!”<sup>82</sup> Pot sent Xuan off with a gift for Hoang Tung—a baby crocodile.<sup>83</sup>

This was a period of peace along the border. Hanoi says that following the May meetings, “border incidents decreased in number.”<sup>84</sup> On the Cambodian side, *Tung Padevat* reported that “even now the enemy cannot persist in trying to have his way with us. . . . The enemy is hesitant towards us. . . . It is impossible for the enemy to attack us.”<sup>85</sup> On 21 September a Vietnamese civil aircraft arrived at Pochentong airport, inaugurating a regular but rarely used fortnightly Air Vietnam service.<sup>86</sup> Delegations were not criss-crossing one another as in mid-1975, but there was more traffic than at any time since. Vietnamese ships sailed to Phnom Penh with cargoes of salt.<sup>87</sup> Cambodia imported five hundred thousand meters of Vietnamese cloth.<sup>88</sup>

The journalists had left Phnom Penh with a Cambodian request for permission to send a return women's delegation to Vietnam. Hanoi saw this as a welcome gesture, since the Cambodian side had broken off relations with the Vietnamese Women's Union at the end of 1975.<sup>89</sup> The

<sup>80</sup> Author's interview with Ha Thi Que, Hanoi, 4 November 1980.

<sup>81</sup> Hu Nim's confessional account is reproduced in Boua, Chandler, Kiernan, eds., *Pol Pot Plans the Future*, p. 243.

<sup>82</sup> Author's interview with Tran Thanh Xuan, 1980. The text of the interview was published in *Vietnam Courier*, no. 52, September 1976, pp. 5-7. Pol Pot's statement was that solidarity “between Kampuchea and Vietnam is both a strategic question and a sacred feeling” (p. 7).

<sup>83</sup> Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, p. 34, citing Hoang Tung's interview with James Burnet on 12 January 1986.

<sup>84</sup> *White Paper*, Hanoi, 20 January 1978.

<sup>85</sup> *Tung Padevat*, June 1976.

<sup>86</sup> British Broadcasting Corporation, *Summary of World Broadcasts* (BBC SWB), FE/5320/A3/2, 24 September 1976; Twining, in Jackson, ed., *Cambodia 1975-1978*, p. 137.

<sup>87</sup> “Life in Southern Cambodia,” 25 January 1977, p. 4.

<sup>88</sup> Cambodian National Archives, records of the Ministry of Commerce of Democratic Kampuchea, Box 4, Dossier 16, “Benchhi khleang pholitphol borotes kit trim thngai 30-9-76” (“Warehouse list: foreign products as of 30-9-76”).

<sup>89</sup> In Hanoi in 1975, the Cambodian ambassador's wife had complained to Lao women's union officials that Vietnam was trying to annex her country and was supporting Sihanouk, even though he had killed many Cambodian communists. The Vietnamese Women's Union replied that they supported the united front, not Sihanouk's anticommunist killings, but Democratic Kampuchea broke off relations with the Vietnamese

delegation of five Cambodian women, who also visited Albania, North Korea, and Laos,<sup>90</sup> toured Vietnam from 28 August to 4 September 1976.

The official president of the DK Women's Association, Pol Pot's wife Khieu Ponnary, was not a member of the delegation. Its leader was Leng Sei, thirty-five, a former teacher at the same Phnom Penh school Ponnary's sister, Ieng Thirith, taught at. Sei, whose real name was Leng Sim Hak, was married to Deputy Information Minister Tiv 01. She was CPK secretary of the ministry of social welfare and director of the April 17 Hospital,<sup>91</sup> but since the CPK remained secret she was described as "a member of the Standing Committee of the Women's Association of Phnom Penh."<sup>92</sup> Two delegation members were officials of Northern and Eastern Zone Women's Associations, and one was a "textile worker." The fifth, a soldier named Ren, was a member of a regimental staff and of the Standing Committee of the DK Women's Association.<sup>93</sup> Thus the delegation's senior Association official was ranked last. It was the CPK hierarchy that counted.

The Cambodians flew first to Ho Chi Minh City. On arrival, they told their Vietnamese counterparts that they did not want to discuss "Indochina" and preferred to treat Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia separately. Ha Thi Que, president of the Vietnamese Women's Union and a member of the VWP Central Committee, recalls: "We said that we were willing to agree to this."<sup>94</sup> This seems to have satisfied Leng Sei, who later said in a public speech in Hanoi, "We pledge to tend to our militant solidarity" and to "oppose all divisive acts in any form. . . . and to make our relations evergreen."<sup>95</sup> From Vung Tau (a beach resort) and cooperatives in the south, the guests went to scenic Ha Long Bay and factories in the north. Throughout, they "spoke very few words," apart from Leng Sei, who introduced herself to Ha Thi Que as a teacher. "They were a little reticent, which was difficult for us, but we talked when they asked us anything," Que recalls. "They were very surprised to see the way of life in Ho Chi Minh City. Cambodia and Vietnam seemed like two different worlds. You could see on their faces that they liked the life in Ho Chi Minh City, but they did not dare say so. They called Ho Chi Minh City "capitalist." After Vietnam, they went on to Laos. There, they refused to join in dancing, as was the Lao and Khmer custom, or to participate with the Lao women in their traditional show of friendship, which is to tie threads around your wrists." Que claims the Lao women were rather disappointed.<sup>96</sup> As the Cambodians returned home, Democratic Kampuchea's relations with Vietnam and Laos were about to reach a crisis point.

---

women's organization in late 1975 or early 1976. Author's interview with Ha Thi Que, Hanoi, 4 November 1980.

<sup>90</sup> FBIS, Asia Pacific, 20 September 1976, p. H10, quoting Phnom Penh Radio of 18 September 1976.

<sup>91</sup> People's Republic of Kampuchea, *People's Revolutionary Tribunal Held in Phnom Penh for the Trial of the Genocide Crime of the Pol Pot-Ieng Sary Clique*, August 1979, Document no. 2.5.24, DK S-21 document, "Important Culprits (Arrested from 1976 to April 9, 1978)," English translation, p. 7.

<sup>92</sup> FBIS, Asia Pacific, 2 September 1976, p. K10, quoting Hanoi Radio of 31 August 1976.

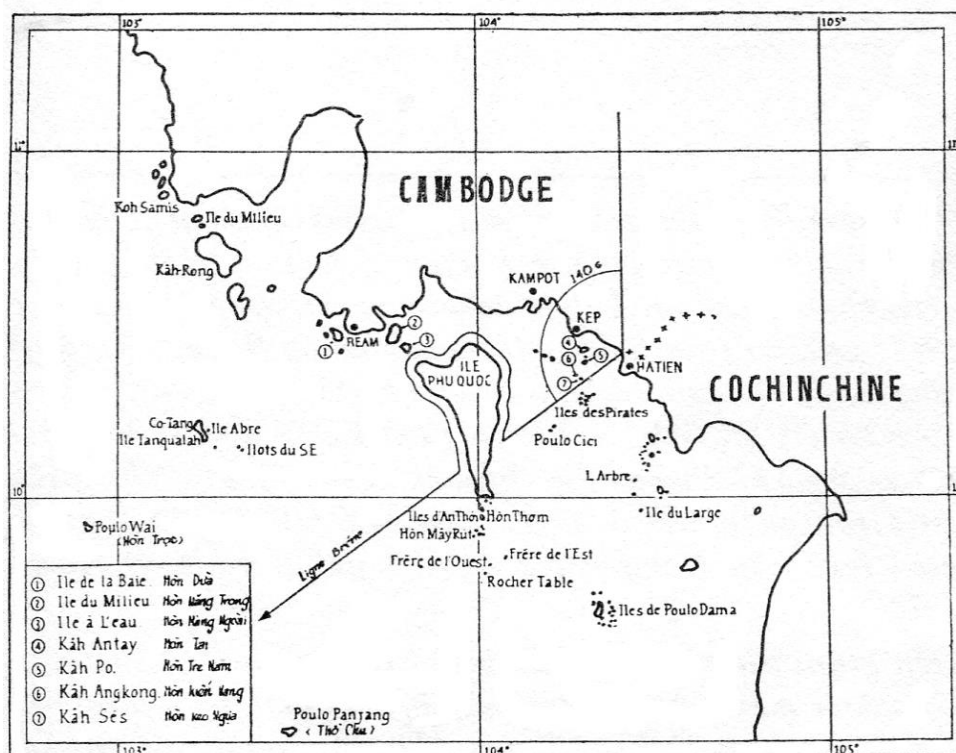
<sup>93</sup> The particulars of the Cambodian delegation were provided to the author by the Vietnamese Women's Union in Hanoi on 5 November 1980. The members were named as Leng Sei, Bo Ven, So Se, Vuon, and Ren, respectively. They were accompanied by Yek Srun, wife of Sok Kheang, the DK ambassador in Hanoi.

<sup>94</sup> Author's interview with Ha Thi Que, Hanoi, 4 November 1980. She added, "We wanted peace and freedom for their country." Other details of the women's delegations are also taken from this interview.

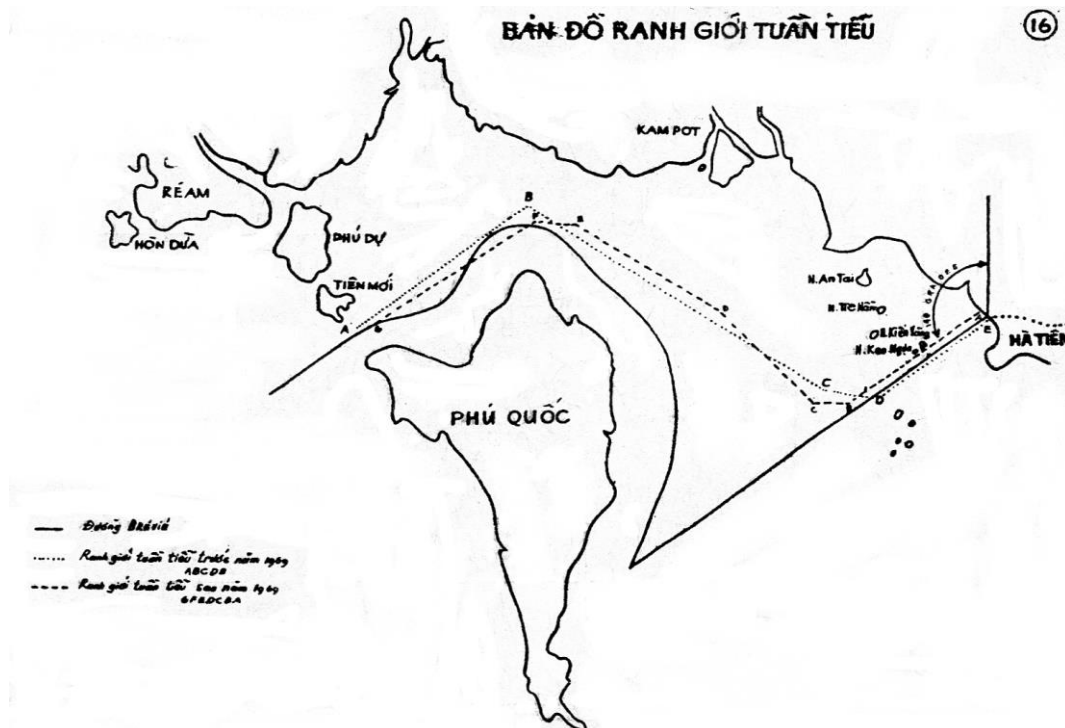
<sup>95</sup> FBIS, Asia Pacific, 2 September 1976, p. K10, quoting Hanoi Radio of 31 August 1976.

<sup>96</sup> Author's interview with Ha Thi Que, 1980.

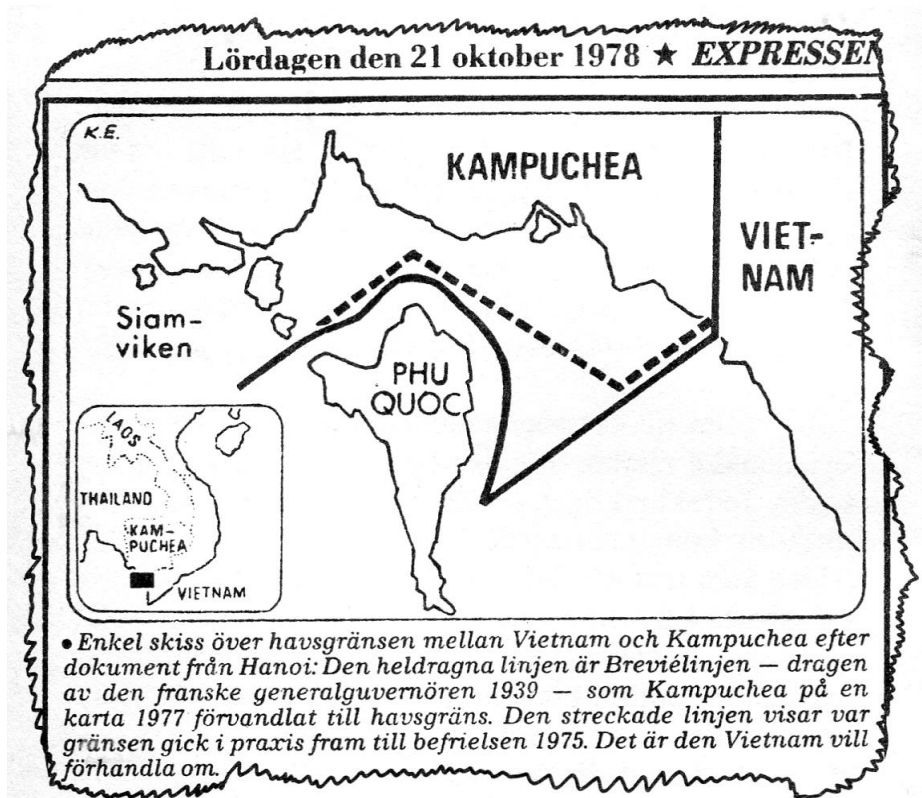
## Kartbilaga



“Konturkarta över förvaltningsgränser och poliszoner med avseende på öarna i överensstämmelse med Cirkulär nr 867 API, daterat 31/1 1939 av guvernör J Brévié.”. Det är denna havsgräns som Pol Pot-regimen ansåg skulle gälla.



Karta från Saigons flotta 1973 (“Karta över gränserna för bevakningen ....”), som visar är 3 olika gränsdragningar. Den heldragna ska föreställa Brevié-linjen (där delen väster om ön inte överensstämmer med föregående karta – se ovan). De två andra (som skiljer sig ytterst lite) är de som i praktiken hade använts fram till dess.



Vietnameserna ville förhandla utifrån den gränslinje som man ansåg fungerat i praktiken sedan 1950-talet. OBS att "Brevié-linjen" här överensstämmer med den som finns på den kartan från 1973 (från Saigon-regeringen)