

By Diana Johnstone

PARIS

PRINCE NORODOM SIHANOUK has moved from Pyongyang to Paris to organize his diplomatic offensive aimed at getting Vietnam to give him back Cambodia. Arriving in Paris from Peking on Nov. 25, the phoenix-like prince, who has had better luck than most of his compatriots in surviving the successive disasters visited on his unhappy country, stressed his long-standing friendship with France and his condemnation of his erstwhile allies the Khmer Rouge, still supported by China. France was obviously ready to give its diplomatic support to Sihanouk insofar as he succeeds in the next few months in gaining leadership of the fragmented Cambodian exile community and, above all, in convincing other governments that he represents a credible alternative to the Phnom Penh regime of Heng Samrin, brought to power by the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia last January.

Vietnam condemned the operation in strong terms. On the eve of Sihanouk's arrival in France, the Vietnamese Communist Party organ *Nhan Dan* published a lengthy article by national assembly president and official party historian Truong Chinh firmly rejecting any search for a "political solution" to the Cambodian problem that might jeopardize the Heng Samrin regime. Reviewing recent Indochinese history to show that Vietnam had been drawn into Cambodia in self-defense against Khmer Rouge attacks encouraged by China in line with China's traditional strategy of trying to encircle and weaken Vietnam, Truong Chinh called this year's political changes in Cambodia "irreversible."

Observers in Paris differed in their assessment of Sihanouk's chances. Some, like journalist Jean Lacouture, see a slim chance that Vietnam, faced with a hostile world and staggering economic problems of its own, may find hanging onto Cambodia too great a drain and be willing to accept some sort of a compromise with Sihanouk once it is clear that he is now independent of China. But others fear that the anti-Vietnamese campaign building up around the Sihanouk initiative will not only prolong the fighting in western Cambodia and drive the Vietnamese further into a stubborn and dangerous isolation—dangerous to themselves and to what remains of the Khmer nation.

While condemning Vietnamese military occupation of Cambodia, Sihanouk is quicker than others to recall that it was the Khmer Rouge who started the war with Vietnam. He has stressed that he is not anti-Vietnamese, and recognizes that no Cambodian resistance can hope to defeat the powerful Vietnamese military machine. But he called for the creation of a nationalist army to harass the Vietnamese.

In practice, Sihanouk's strategy seemed to depend on two weapons outside his control. The military weapon to harass the Vietnamese army is composed mainly, whether Sihanouk likes it or not, of the estimated 30,000 to 40,000 Khmer Rouge soldiers armed by China via Thailand—which provides them with temporary sanctuary—plus a rag-tag collection of private militias.

The other weapon is a propaganda offensive against Vietnam much more violent than Sihanouk's own statements so far. Three participants in a 90-minute French television panel discussion featuring Sihanouk two days after his arrival in France accused Vietnam of "genocide" in Cambodia, and brushed aside testimony to the contrary by the only two panel members who have spent much time in Cambodia recently—journalist Wilfred Burchett and French doctor Jean-Yves Follezu—by accusing them of being "Communists." The "genocide" charge was launched by right-wing French parliamentarian Alain Madelin who recently made a lightning visit to Phnom Penh and concluded rather hastily, but with evident ideological satisfaction, that the Vietnamese were helping themselves to food aid sent to Cam-

bodia. The charge was echoed by missionary Francois Ponchaud, who said that the "same sources" on which he based his earlier charges of Khmer Rouge genocide had informed him that "a more subtle and systematic genocide" is being carried out by the Vietnamese. This was too much for Jean Lacouture, who in the past has accepted Ponchaud's sources. Lacouture considers that the Khmer Rouge mass killing stemmed from a kind of madness caused by extreme isolation, comparable to the Jim Jones sect in Guyana. But the Vietnamese, he maintained, are nothing if not rational and would have no reason to wipe out the population—even a colony needs native labor.

Anti-Vietnamese sentiment.

What with rightists who will not forgive the Vietnamese for having defeated the West, and disillusioned leftists ready to believe the worst of their former idols, it is almost fashionable these days to accuse the Vietnamese of every imaginable crime. Vietnamese reluctance to let more than a few selected friends see the mess they are in lends credibility to the worst accusations against them.

In fact, except for such an obviously politically motivated visitor as Madelin, the Westerners—mostly doctors and relief workers—who have been in Vietnamese-occupied Cambodia concur in describing a hungry and traumatized population that greeted the Vietnamese as liberators. This sentiment may not last forever, but neither, apparently, has it lasted in Uganda, whose Tanzanian liberators have reportedly behaved somewhat badly without raising the indignation of the governments that hastily dropped Idi Amin but continue to support the Pol Pot government in the United Nations. The Vietnamese, like the Tanzanians, were provoked by their neighboring despot into overthrowing him, and are certainly justified in complaining at the double standard by which the world condemns them but hails Tanzania and even France for overthrowing Bokassa. The world's readiness to con-

Clockwise from the top: The new currency printed in China was never used in Cambodia; racks of skulls found outside a Cambodian prison camp; the women in this family were digging their own mass grave when their captors fled at the approach of Heng Samrin troops.

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demn them only makes the Vietnamese less willing to allow the outside world to see Cambodian calamities for which they will probably be blamed, which in turn makes the outside world more suspicious of the Vietnamese, and incidentally obstructs any efforts to help the Cambodian people recover. It is hard to see an end to this vicious circle.

The historical view.

Some members of what might be called France's community of "concerned Asian scholars," who have closely followed Indochinese events for many years, stress the need to grasp the real historic reasons for the Vietnamese presence in Cambodia in order to avoid either of the opposing ideological explanations: (1) that they are there as angelic benefactors, or (2) that they went in as wicked imperialists.

According to these scholars, the invasion is not due to some irradicable racial hostility between Vietnamese and Khmers,

still less to Sino-Soviet rivalry, but primarily to the inner weakness of the Khmer Rouge regime itself which led it to become a base of Chinese-backed harassment of Vietnam.

The Cambodian Communist Party was always small and weak, numbering only a few hundred when Sihanouk was overthrown by Lon Nol in 1970 and growing to perhaps a couple of thousand by 1972. At that time the Party secretary Saloth Sar, who later took the name Pol Pot, was political commissar of the guerrilla army, which became the real instrument of Party rule. This Party could never have come to power in Cambodia by itself under normal circumstances. It was brought to power by the overthrow of Sihanouk, who allied with the Communists he had previously persecuted and driven into guerrilla resistance, even becoming their figurehead leader from his exile in Peking, by the American bombing that disrupted the countryside and radicalized the peasantry, and by

