

## **Southeast Asia: Vietnam Begins Cambodia Offensive; Other Developments**

- [Thailand Charges Vietnam Incursion](#)
- [U.S. Condemns Vietnamese Raids](#)
- [Thach Reveals Peace Proposal](#)
- [China, Vietnam Clash Along Border](#)

Vietnamese troops April 14-15 launched a major offensive against the three Cambodian rebel groups fighting to overthrow the Vietnamese-backed government of Cambodia. [See 1984 [Cambodia: Khmer Rouge Claims Major Victory](#)]

Vietnamese troops annually launched a November-to-May dry season offensive on the Thai-Cambodian border against the Cambodian resistance groups. However, a protracted major offensive in 1984 had seemed increasingly unlikely because the dry season was almost over. Instead of a long border offensive, the Vietnamese thus far had focused on attacking guerrillas in the interior.

(A Washington Post article datelined March 29 cited an unidentified diplomat in Thailand who commented on the fact that in the current season Vietnam had deployed more soldiers in the interior than it had used in the previous years border offensive. The diplomat said, "This year, for the first time, the Vietnamese have to confront the resistance as a genuine military threat." He continued, "They can no longer dismiss [the resistance] 'as small fish'.")

The main thrust of the new offensive was an attack on the headquarters of the rebel Khmer Peoples National Liberation Front at the Ampil camp April 15. The KPNLF was led by Son Sann, who was the premier of the rebel coalition government. Initial reports said the Vietnamese had captured the camp. However, rebels and some Thai officials said that although the Vietnamese had broken through the KPNLF's forward defense lines and advanced to within half a mile (800 meters) of the camp by April 17, they had not succeeded in capturing it.

Following up on an intense artillery assault, about 2,000 Vietnamese troops had attacked the camp. KPNLF rebels took up positions just east of Ampil and counterattacked in small groups, according to a Thai army spokesman. The rebels said April 18 that they had repulsed a Vietnamese infantry attack on the camp, killing 100 of the enemy. The KPNLF April 22 claimed that they had driven the Vietnamese out of positions the Vietnamese had seized at Beoung Ampil, a lake just outside Ampil.

A military officer at Aranyaprathet, a Thai town on the Cambodian border, said 50 civilians were killed or wounded in the attack on Ampil, and 35 other people suffered burns from what he said were poison gas shells fired by the Vietnamese. Some 30,000 out of a reported total of about 32,000 refugees at Ampil camp were evacuated to Thailand.

Also April 15, Vietnamese troops attacked another KPNLF camp, Sokh San, on the southern part of the Thai-Cambodian border, forcing some 8,000 Cambodian refugees to flee into Thailand. Reports received by Thai and Western relief sources the following day said the camp was seized and destroyed.

A further attack was directed against the Borei camp southwest of Ampil, occupied by Khmer Rouge supporters of ousted Premier Pol Pot. Some 2,000 refugees were forced into Thailand. Ban Scarat, another Khmer Rouge camp on the northern border with Thailand, had been shelled April 14. At least 60 Cambodians were reported killed or wounded, and some 4,000 refugees fled across the border. A Thai spokesman said Vietnamese antiaircraft guns had shot down a Thai patrol plane in the vicinity of that battle April 15. Thai air force jets April 16 attacked a hill on Thai territory in Surin province, believing that Vietnamese troops had hidden there after downing the Thai plane.

News reports April 17 said as many as 100,000 refugees had fled into Thailand from Cambodia in the previous three weeks. These included 30,000 Cambodians evacuated April 14 in anticipation of a Vietnamese attack on a camp at Ta Tum straddling the Thai-Cambodian border east of Ampil. The Ta Tum camp was the headquarters of Prince Norodom Sihanouk, the former ruler of Cambodia, who headed the third faction in the rebel coalition.

### **Thailand Charges Vietnam Incursion**

Thai military sources said March 29 that Vietnamese soldiers overran a Khmer Rouge camp near the Chong Phra Palai Pass between Cambodia and Thailand March 25 and then advanced into Thailand in pursuit of the rebels.

Thai troops claimed to have captured 40 of the estimated 300 Vietnamese intruders March 29. (Thailand's army chief, Gen. Arthit Kamlang-ek, said March 31 that 34 of the 40 were, in fact, captured by the Khmer Rouge.) Most of the invaders were reported by the Thai army command to have been driven back into Cambodia March 28, although fighting in the pass was

reported continuing April 4.

In addition to the intrusion in March, Thailand said April 15 that Vietnamese shells landed on its territory during the Ampil attack and that Thai gunners had returned artillery fire.

Vietnamese Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach said April 15 that the current Vietnamese offensive was not aimed at countries neighboring Cambodia. He added that Vietnam could easily defeat the Chinese-backed Khmer Rouge rebels were it not for "sanctuaries in Thailand, whose sovereignty we don't want to violate."

Thach ruled out the possibility of talks with the resistance groups.

### **U.S. Condemns Vietnamese Raids**

The U.S. State Department April 17 condemned the Vietnamese attacks on the Cambodian border settlements as a threat to the security of Thailand.

President Reagan April 13 had met in Washington, D.C. with Thailand's premier, Gen. Prem Tinsulanonda, and announced after the meeting that the U.S. would sell 40 M-48 tanks to Thailand to bolster that nation's border defenses. The administration also agreed to easier foreign military sales terms for Thailand.

Prem, who was on a six-nation tour, had lodged a complaint with the United Nations March 29 against aggression by Vietnamese forces.

(U.S. State Department spokesman John Hughes also April 17 criticized Soviet amphibious exercises currently taking place in Vietnam, charging a Soviet military buildup in Southeast Asia. Vietnamese Foreign Minister Thach confirmed April 20 that the Soviet Union was holding landing exercises south of Haiphong. The exercises reportedly marked the first time that foreign troops had been on Vietnamese soil since U.S. troops left in 1975.)

### **Thach Reveals Peace Proposal**

In a radio broadcast March 26, Thach had detailed a five-point solution for peace in Cambodia that he had recently discussed with Australian leaders on a trip to that nation.

The five points were: the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Cambodia; "complete elimination of Pol Pot...and his accomplices" to establish a security zone along the Thai-Cambodian border; peaceful borders between China and the Indochinese countries and between Thailand and Laos; free general elections in Cambodia, excluding "Pol Pot and his accomplices," and international guarantees and supervision on all these issues.

Thach described Pol Pot's accomplices as the rebel groups headed by Son Sann and Sihanouk. He said that these "accomplices" would be allowed to participate in elections if they disarmed, renounced their association with the Khmer Rouge and agreed to "respect the constitution" of the current Cambodian government. Sihanouk and Son Sann rejected the proposal.

Thach had visited Australia March 14-20. During the tour, Australian leaders had suggested that Vietnam refrain from undertaking a dry-season offensive. Australian officials said Vietnam's failure thus far to initiate a major offensive in 1984 could be viewed as a desire to be more accommodating. [See 1983 [Australia: Hayden Visits Vietnam](#)]

In other developments in the Cambodian conflict:

- The Khmer Rouge had accused Vietnam of using toxic chemicals in Battambang, killing 92 people between March 31 and April 4, it was reported April 19.
- The Khmer Rouge April 11 claimed in a radio broadcast to have destroyed Kompong Speu, a provincial capital some 25 miles (40 kilometers) south of Phnom Penh, on the night of April 8.
- A Khmer Rouge radio broadcast March 29 claimed that three Soviet advisers were killed in Cambodia March 18 when their jeep ran over a land mine near Siem Reap.
- Thai army officers said March 11 that Cambodian rebels had cut Vietnamese troops' main supply routes, forcing Vietnam to fly supplies to outposts in western Cambodia.
- Khmer Rouge rebels said Feb. 16 that they had captured Battambang in western Cambodia Feb. 11, driving out the Vietnamese occupation forces in the city, which was the most important in the west.

### **China, Vietnam Clash Along Border**

Hanoi charged April 6 that Chinese troops had crossed into Vietnam and engaged in combat with Vietnamese forces in what appeared to be an attempt to draw Vietnamese soldiers from the battle with Cambodian resistance forces.

China, which had announced April 2 that it had shelled Vietnamese frontier forces, denied the invasion charge. China said it began shelling Vietnamese frontier positions in retaliation for what it described as repeated provocations by Vietnam along the border in March. Vietnam was said to have shelled targets in China's Yunnan province and Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region.

China's April 2 attack was reportedly the first time in over a year that China had shelled Vietnam. In April 1983, Vietnam had accused China of shelling its border positions to help the Cambodian rebels. [See 1983 [Southeast Asia: Vietnam Claims Cambodia Victory](#)]

The London Times reported April 6 that Hanoi had accused Peking and Bangkok of collusion in support of the Cambodian rebels. Hanoi said the shelling of Vietnam by China was "clearly a calculated act aimed at putting pressure on Vietnam from two sides." Vietnam followed up April 9 with a charge that the military action along the Sino-Vietnamese border and the Thai-Cambodian border was part of a "global strategy" by China and Washington to "prevent the newly independent countries from advancing toward socialism." Vietnam's foreign ministry April 4 demanded an immediate end to the shelling.

That day, China reported 35 Chinese civilians killed or wounded by Vietnamese shells and said its artillery had retaliated, destroying eight Vietnamese observation posts. China said its forces had killed or wounded 23 Vietnamese April 5 after a few Vietnamese crossed into China in an attempt to plant land mines in Yunnan.

Vietnam said the April 6 invasion was carried out by 2,000 Chinese troops backed by artillery and rockets. China's foreign ministry April 7 called the invasion charge a "complete fabrication." Vietnamese radio April 8 reported that the intruders had been dislodged April 7 from positions they had held on two hills in Lang Son province. The New China News Agency reported continuing hostilities along the border.

In the following days, each country accused the other of new hostilities and claimed retaliatory actions. However, Western diplomats in the region said they saw no evidence of major troop movements in China to indicate a major escalation in the confrontation. China was estimated to have some 330,000 soldiers stationed in its three southernmost provinces, confronting some 600,000 Vietnamese in north Vietnam.

In another incident, China said it had fired on a Vietnamese spy plane March 28 as it flew over Pingxiang in Guangxi Zhuang. Peking said its gunners hit the plane, forcing it to return to Vietnam.

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### [Modern Language Association \(MLA\)](#)

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