

Fighting the Vietnamese "crocodiles"

Written by

Wednesday, 27 May 2009 05:00

Journalist and expert witness Nayan Chanda [testified at the tribunal](#) Monday and part of Tuesday about armed conflict between Cambodia and Vietnam during the period of Democratic Kampuchea. Throughout the late 1970s, the Khmer Rouge waged repeated "nibbling" attacks across the border into Vietnam, often massacring Vietnamese civilians, he told the court.

While those associated with Vietnam were purged internally, Khmer Rouge leaders [called on their people to kill](#) all 50 million Vietnamese. In the end, this virulent hatred led to the regime's downfall.

Convinced that the Khmer Rouge were pawns of the Chinese, the Soviet-backed Vietnamese eventually decided to hit back hard, Chanda said. They drove the Khmer Rouge into the jungle and took control of the country for a decade.

Yet it was the Vietnamese Communists who had initially trained and equipped Cambodia's revolutionary fighters. How had such an enormous schism between the two Communist movements come about?

As Chanda explained, Vietnam and Cambodia have "had a pretty tormented relationship." Cambodian folk tales even describe the cruelty of the Vietnamese to Khmers. Yet there have also been numerous periods of collaboration between the two peoples.

But recurrent tensions, prompted by fears of Vietnamese "expansionism" and an undeniable strain of paranoia, undermined pre-Democratic Kampuchea Communist cooperation. Cambodians saw their eastern neighbors as "swallowers of other countries' territories."

This was compounded by the fact that, according to Chanda, the Khmer Rouge took an "openly racist" stance toward the Vietnamese.

"The Black Paper," an anti-Vietnamese manifesto created by DK in 1978, describes "the Vietnamese nature as aggressive," Chanda said. While it is "a mixture of fact and fantasy" that

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allegedly chronicles the history of Cambodian/Vietnamese relations, the document can offer insight into Khmer Rouge ideology, he added.

The issue of anti-Vietnamese racism in Cambodia has intrigued me for some time and, unfortunately, I think many of the same stereotypes (in a less extreme form) exist today. So I tried to find a copy of The Black Paper online.

I was not successful in this endeavor, and was only able to find other articles that quoted from The Black Paper. I've included several interesting Black Paper excerpts below that I pulled from the essay "The Ingratitude of the Crocodiles: the 1978 Cambodian Black Paper," published by the *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* in 1980. (It should be noted that one of the essay's authors, Serge Thion, has come under fire for polarizing comments he has made about the Holocaust.)

* In The Black Paper, the Vietnamese are described as *even more ungrateful than crocodiles*.

* The paper refers to the *annexationist nature of Vietnam*, which has never stopped trying to *de vour* Cambodia.

* *Yuon is the name given by Kampuchea's people to the Vietnamese since the epoch of Angkor and it means "savage." The words "Vietnam" and "Vietnamese" are very recent and not often used by Kampuchea's people.* (The essay goes on to discredit this explanation, saying that the word "Yuon" exists in both Thai and Cham. Interestingly, "Comrade Duch" still refers to Vietnamese as "Yuon" when he speaks at the tribunal.)

* *As they had made the revolution, the Vietnamese enjoyed some prestige in Southeast Asia. At that time, the international community gave them aid and support. Europe supported them. China helped and supported them. The Vietnamese have taken advantage of this support and used it as political support in order to carry out their scheme of expansion and annexation. They wanted to dominate all of "Indochina" . . . They want to take possession of Kampuchea in order to use her as a springboard for their expansion in Southeast Asia . . ."*

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* *The Vietnamese even wanted to teach Kampuchea how to cook rice!*

Following Chanda, [scholar Craig Etcheson](#) once again began testifying Tuesday afternoon, but was interrupted by defense objections. He may continue his testimony tomorrow.