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VIETNAM'S INDOCHINA TRIANGLE: A Quiet Colonization of Northeast Cambodia

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(Unofficial/draft translation from French)

Known today as the 'Cambodia-Laos-Vietnam Triangle (CLV)' it was initially baptized by Vietnam as 'Indochina Triangle,' then changed to 'Vietnam-Cambodia-Laos Development Triangle'. The Vietnamese has specified that its creation was made 'on the proposal of Mr Hun Sen, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Cambodia during the meeting of the PM of the three countries in Vientiane, Laos, of October 20, 1999. '

I.- GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

In 1999, only four provinces were to form the Triangle: Gia Lai, Kon Tum (Vietnam), Attapeu (Laos), and Rattanakiri (Cambodia).

In January 2002 at a meeting in Ho-Chi-Minh City, it was extended to seven provinces: Gia Lai, Kon Tum, Dac Lac (Vietnam), Attapeu, Sékong (Laos), Rattanakiri, Stung Treng (Cambodia).

In September 2003, at the Pleiku meeting, he grew up in eight provinces: three from Vietnam (Gia Lai, Kon Tum, Dac Lac), three from Cambodia (Rattanakiri, Steung Treng, Mondulkiri) and two from Laos (Attapeu, Sékong).

In 2004, the Lao side proposed to enlarge it to ten provinces: Gia Lai, Kon Tum, Dac Lac, Dac Nông (Vietnam); Rattanakiri, Stung Treng, and Mondulkiri (Cambodia); Attapeu, Sékong, and Saravan (Laos).

In 2009, the Triangle included thirteen provinces: 5 from Vietnam (Kon Tum, Gia Lai, Dak Lak, Dak Nông, Binh Phuoc), 4r from Laos (Sekong, Attapeu, Saravan, Champassak) and 4 from Cambodia (Ratanakiri, Stung Treng, Mondulkiri, Kratié). (1)

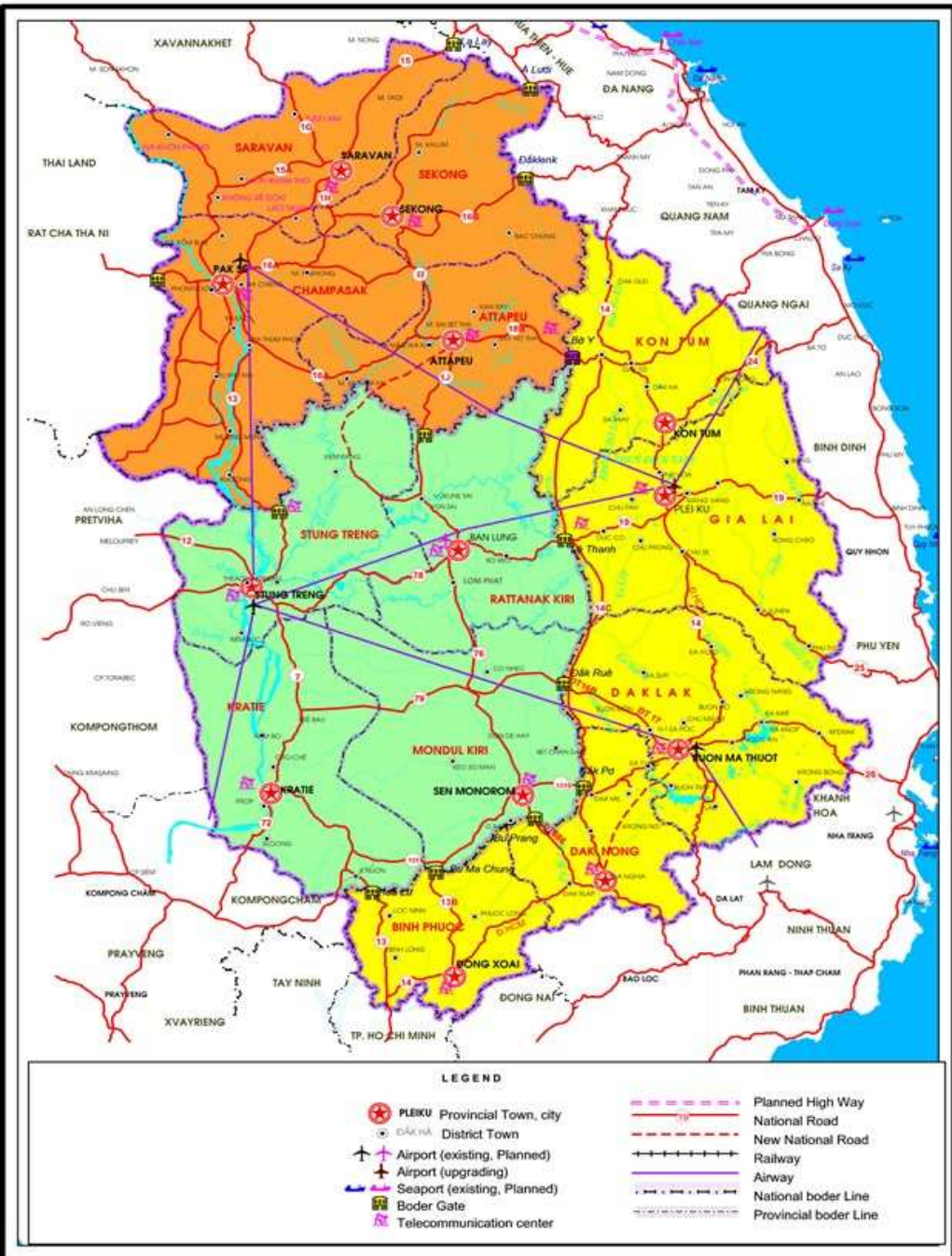
Until the middle of the 20th century, the whole region was populated by numerous ethnic minorities who, along with the Khmers, were the first occupants of the peninsula. They are designated today under the common name of "Montagnards." During these last decades, in Vietnam, as in Laos, these Montagnards have been expropriated from their ancestral lands and driven back to even more distant and inaccessible regions. The recalcitrants were brutally repressed, even massacred, by the communist authorities of the day.

The inhabitants of Cambodia's Ratanakiri and Mondulkiri consist almost exclusively of ethnic minorities: the Brao, Tampuan, Kravê, Bu Nöng, Stieng, Jaray, Saöch, Kuoy, Phnong, Rhadé..., called the 'Khmer Leu', the Khmer of the highlands.

The four Cambodian provinces involved in the Triangle have a total area of 47,256 Km², or more than a quarter (26.10%) of the country, with only, in 2011, around 471,000 inhabitants (10 inhabitants per Km²). In October 2013, Hun Sen decided to split the province of Kompong Cham into two small provinces separated by the Mekong: Kompong Cham to the west and, to the east, Tbong Khmum, bordering Vietnam. Will the new Tbong Khmum soon join the famous Triangle?

CLV Triangle Map, Source: VietNam: http://clv-development.org/en/Pages/Introduction_of_Development_Triangle.aspx

THE ADMINISTRATIVE MAP OF CAMBODIA - LAOS - VIETNAM DEVELOPMENT TRIANGLE AREA



The table below gives the figures of the various components of the Triangle:

COUNTRIES (No of Provinces)	AREAS	POPULATIONS (2011)	% Population/ TOTAL	Densities Inhab/Km ²
Vietnam (5)	51 740 Km²	5 020 000	76.0	96
Laos (4)	46 746 Km²	1 110 000	16.8	24
Cambodia (4)	47 256 Km²	471 000	7.2	10
TOTAL	145 742 Km²	6 601 000	100.0	

The Ratanakiri and Mondulkiri provinces are bathed by numerous rivers, including the Sékong, Sésan and Sépépok rivers, and are rich in very fertile red soils. Indeed, Ratanakiri and Mondulkiri are rich in noble woods (trees 40 to 50 meters high and more than 2 meters in diameter), also rich in semi-precious stones (deposits of zircons, sapphires and rubies in Bor Kèò and gold in Bor Kham) and zirconium, bauxite, iron, coal mines, as well as unexploited wealth such as animal husbandry in the Ratanakiri highlands. However, until 1959, Ratanakiri and Mondulkiri lived in self-sufficiency, mainly from the traditional itinerant slash and burn culture.

For many reasons, the very sparsely populated Ratanakiri, Mondulkiri, and Stung Trèng provinces have always been neglected by the rest of Cambodia. From 1958, the Cambodian Government decides to give priority to the settlement of the provinces of Ratanakiri and Mondulkiri by Khmers from the other provinces, for a first development of the region, and also to counter the influx of Vietnamese settlers from the across the border from the provinces of Dac Lac and Pleiku.

II.- POLICY DATA

The Triangle occupies exactly the center of the former French Indochina, the passage of the fighting forces, especially those of the Vietnamese communists, during the last Indochina wars.

In 1979, Charles Meyer, a French geographer who lived in Cambodia for a long time wrote: "In 1970, the Vietnamese war exploded in Cambodia and the Vietnamese communists de facto occupied the two provinces of Ratanakiri and Mondulkiri. It was from these two provinces that "They organize control of all of eastern Cambodia, even after the Khmer Rouge takeover of Phnom-Penh. But already before 1970, these Vietnamese did not miss any opportunity to encourage riots and rebellions by the Khmer Leu against the authorities. of Phnom-Penh, who then tried to populate and enhance the region."

In 1973 and again in 1975 and 1977, Pol Pot asked the Vietnamese communist forces to withdraw from Ratanakiri to no avail.

On January 27, 2002, the Vietnamese PM Phan Van Khai declared that the establishment of the Triangle was "a contribution to peace and stability in the region, as well as to the maintenance of security and social order along the borders of the three countries, as well as the effectiveness of their fight against terrorist attacks, transnational crimes, and drug trafficking."

On July 21, 2004, in Siemreap, Phan Van Khai clarified: "The Triangle occupies a strategic position for the three countries on the political, economic, social,

environmental and ecological levels, but at present, there is still a sub-region developed, with poor socio-economic infrastructure..."

On November 28, 2004, in Vientiane, Phan Van Khai clearly recalled the arguments of the Vietnamese colonialists in 1979 : "History has linked our three nations ... The demand for development of each country and the current conjuncture requires us to be linked more closely in the interests of peace, security, and prosperity... The Triangle actively contributes to strengthening the relations of cooperation and traditional friendship between our three peoples... "

III.- ADMINISTRATION

As in this historical past, Vietnam will take care of the administration of the said Triangle. On November 28, 2004, in Vientiane, Khai proposed to create "a Coordinating Committee to support the leaders of the three countries in problems relating to the Triangle, ensure close collaboration between these three countries in the process of its construction, unify measures fundraising for projects decided in the overall development plan..."

In 2007, "Joint Coordination Committees" were therefore created not only at the government level but also at the provincial level, to decide on funding budgets and the nature of all kinds of settlements in the area and at all levels. , the Vietnamese make all the decisions for the development of the Triangle. In addition, Vietnamese investments have spread to other neighboring Cambodian provinces : Kompong Cham, Kompong Thom and Uddar Mean Chey.

Hun Sen for full care by Hanoi

At the Siemreap meeting on July 21, 2004, Hun Sen declared Cambodia's lack of resources for its committed provinces (lack of money, passable roads, schools, medical centers and doctors, qualified personnel, healthy working population, etc.) for the exploitation of the Triangle, and therefore asked Vietnam to take responsibility for building roads there, to train the Khmer Leu in the development of the region, to provide technological and financial assistance, to organize the markets and the circulation of productions and common products of the Triangle... and the rule is applied according to which "the partner country which will have contributed the most (to the organization and 'exploitation of the Triangle) will obviously deserve a greater profit from its investments', he added.

In fact, the only markets for the Triangle's products are only on the Vietnam side, already better equipped in all than Cambodia, and that the Khmers will even have to buy back from Vietnam the products supplied by their own lands.

We have also seen that, in Cambodia as in Laos, the large investors and concessionaires of land (200,000 ha in 2007) are Vietnamese. Very few Cambodian entrepreneurs are interested in it; no Khmer, moreover, has left to work in the Vietnamese provinces, although movement and domiciliation inside the Triangle are completely free for the three 'brother' peoples.

With International involvement

As early as November 2004, Phan Van Khai recommended "mobilizing sources of funds for development projects already agreed" : the three countries, each in turn and on their own account, having to call on the international financial institutions (ADB, IMF) and to foreign governments (Japan in particular) to provide assistance or lend money for the creation of the Triangle. At the same time, each of the three countries will have to reserve a priority share of its own national budget for its funding... The call for foreign funds is nothing more or less than international recognition of the merits of supranational creation of this Triangle wanted by Hanoi. Japan and the ADB ended up bringing some money to Hanoi for the project. It is evident that Vietnam is keen to make payment for its new colonization of Cambodia and Laos by the latter themselves and by foreign aid.

On the other hand, to reassure Thailand, the Vietnamese, in 2000, surely advised Hun Sen to propose to the Thais to also create a "**Triangle of Emerald**" including Thailand, Laos, Cambodia for tourism. The Thais have given their agreement for the formation of this Emerald Triangle, comprising 7 provinces: Uddar Mean Chey, Preah Vihear, Steung Treng (Cambodia), Champassak, Saravan (Laos), Ubon Rachathani, Sisaket (Thailand). In 2003, they asked the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) to finance the project. Without serious tourist demand, the project was "suspended" soon after.

Under the control of the Vietnamese Army

In September 2007, opposition MP Son Chhay, on his return from his visit to the Triangle, declared on RFA radio that: "In fact, there are Vietnamese soldiers who, after being partially evacuated from Cambodia (in 1989), have formed military movements for the rubber, coffee and tea plantations ... and who have now settled in large numbers in front of our border provinces, with all kinds of equipment, and placed under the orders of their generals and officers - forming a real military staff ..."

In Laos, for example, he says, "a 10,000 ha rubber plantation is headed by 176 colonels and captains of the Vietnamese Army, who call themselves "experts "and that for 10,000 ha of the plantation, we employ around 1,000 Laotian workers, alongside more than 3,000 Vietnamese workers. Thus, for our concessions of 100,000 ha for the same plantations (in Ratanakiri, Mondulkiri, Kratié...), it would take ten times more of these "experts" and workers and their families (who make up) the Vietnamese power here. "Also, he adds, there is the problem affecting our environment: our forests have been destroyed by these companies unceremoniously and without compensation. The Cambodian jungle is simply disappearing.

But, the MP cannot ask any question there to the Government, because "these concessions and all the documents relating to them are all secrets". Hun Sen did not react to this solemn denunciation of MP Son Chhay.

Eight years later, on December 24, 2015, a lengthy report by The Cambodia Daily provides more details: in Ratanakiri, land concessions to Vietnamese companies are managed by military units of the 15th Corps of the Vietnamese People's Army based in Gia Lai, a Vietnamese province included in the Triangle... It seems that two months later, in February 2016, Hun Sen decided to "cancel" all the contracts of the said concessions managed by the Vietnamese Army. In any case, on November 24, 2016, the Courier du Vietnam announced that the Vietnamese investments had been made in "more than 100 projects, for around 3.8 billion dollars", for, among other things, the creation of the manufacturing rubber industry and tourism development.

Institutionalization of the Triangle

It is only from 2013 that the National Assemblies of the three countries are interested in the existence of the Triangle. On April 23, 2013, a meeting was held in Mondulkiri of the External Relations Commissions of these Assemblies to define the "Role of the National Assemblies in assisting the Development Triangle" and "the establishment of a new institution Cambodia-Laos-Vietnam Interparliamentary Council ".

On July 17, 2014, another meeting of the Security and Defense Commissions of the three National Assemblies to sign a 9-point Memorandum emphasizing the importance of the development triangle in terms of security and peace and tripartite legal cooperation .

On March 31, 2018, at the 10th PM Summit in Hanoi, according to researcher Chheang Vannarith, "Vietnam proposed that the CLV Triangle be extended to cover the entire territory of the three countries (but there has been no official response from Cambodia and Laos to this proposal yet) ". In any case, they adopted "an action plan on the connectivity of the three Cambodian, Laotian and Vietnamese economies for 2030, which constitutes an orientation for CLV cooperation and promotes connectivity in institutional, infrastructure, economic, as well that human connection "... The Triangle will become, not just a region of economic activity, but an autonomous transnational political community, under the orders of Hanoi.

CONCLUSION

Over the past 20 years, how have the Khmer Leu in the Cambodian Triangle provinces benefited from the region's so-called "rapid economic and social development"? Nothing, having regard to their sufferings of the continuous losses until today (in 2020) of their ancestral lands and their natural environment for their subsistence.

"The Strong Man" Hun Sen, who since 1979 has never dared to protest against Vietnam's annexations and nibbles from Cambodian territories, claimed that his agreements for the Triangle were "*aimed at defending sovereignty and territorial integrity of Cambodia.*"

In fact, as Prime Minister of Cambodia, his 1999 proposal to create the said Triangle was an official recognition of the Vietnamese fait accompli of occupation of the Khmer province of Ratanakiri. Neither the Parliament nor the King of Cambodia was involved in his decision.

North-eastern Cambodia has now become a veritable Vietnamese colony. The creation of this Triangle is a logical continuation of Vietnam's stranglehold on Laos in 1977 and on Cambodia in 1979, for the formation of Vietnamese Indochina desired by Ho Chi Minh. The current Triangle is widened to the left bank of the Mekong, its extension to the north and west of Cambodia is only a matter of time.

This Triangle is, therefore, a flagrant violation of the unity and sovereignty of Cambodia by Vietnam, with the complicity of Hun Sen and his People's Party of Kampuchea.

Dy Kareth, Paris, May 20, 2020