

CAMBODIA

THE PAPER TRAIL

More than 20 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, East Germany's Stasi files are still throwing up some surprises – not least for those living in Cambodia

By Dr Markus Karbaum

It's no secret that the Stasi, one of the world's most effective and repressive secret police agencies, had a thing for information. Its extensive network of spies documented almost every aspect of life in East Germany and infiltrated West Germany's government and spy agencies. But the communist intelligence agency's net was cast far beyond the borders of the European nations; its tentacles reached as far as Vietnam, its closest ally in Southeast Asia.

Buried amongst 111 kilometres of documents at the Stasi archive authority in Germany are dossiers written by Vietnamese officials about some members of Cambodia's current ruling elite when they defected from the Khmer Rouge in the late 1970s.

North Vietnam and the Khmer Rouge were close allies until civil wars that wreaked havoc in their countries ended in 1975, after which point serious border disputes poisoned the relationship between the regimes. In Phnom Penh, Khmer Rouge leader Pol Pot and his henchmen feared Vietnamese spies within their party and began purges in 1977. Numerous Khmer Rouge officers – including the current prime minister of Cambodia, Hun Sen – fled to Vietnam seeking a change of allegiance. Fearing counter-espionage, the Vietnamese detained them and for each officer prepared a dossier, in which they incorporated biographic details and personal assessments.

While Vietnamese intelligence may have been no match for its efficient and methodical East German counterpart, the communist brethren

cooperated in various areas, including the exchange of information. Written between 1978 and 1979 and later translated into German once they were handed over to the Stasi, *MfS – HA II Nr. 38135* includes assessments of people the Vietnamese would install in high-ranking positions in Cambodia, a country it 'liberated' from the Khmer Rouge and occupied in 1979.

There are few doubts about the veracity of the folder, which includes profiles of about 20 individuals and reveals unadorned views of some of those who would become Cambodia's leaders.

The dossier includes assessments of people who did not hold top positions after 1979 and of those who did for a short time only, such as Nou Beng (minister of health and social affairs in the 1980s and governor of

Kratie province after 1993) and Khang

Sarin (minister of interior from 1981 to 1986). Some of the people in the files have passed away: Sing Song – minister for national security for 14 months following his stint as minister of interior from 1988 to 1992 – who died in 2000 and Chea Soth, minister of planning from 1981 to 1986, who enjoyed periods as deputy prime minister during the 1980s and was a member of parliament for four years prior to his death in 2012. Some of the files have been printed twice and others censored, some are thin with only one or two pages per person, while others comprise detailed profiles.

In general, the files appeal unsystematic – compiled from information amassed chaotically rather than methodically – and list the Communist background of each person.



Photos: Stephen Morrison/AFP; MfS - HA II Nr. 38135; Federal Commissioner Preserving the Records of the State Security Service of the former German Democratic Republic



Happy ending: Collected from the Vietnamese, the Stasi file on Prime Minister Hun Sen, who defected from the Khmer Rouge in 1977, show that he was reunited with his wife, Bun Rany, in 1979



Similar to many of his fellow countrymen, Chea Sim – the current president of the Cambodian Senate and the ruling Cambodian People's Party (CPP) – is described in the dossier as someone who hates Pol Pot and Ieng Sary (the late Khmer Rouge foreign minister), and has a strong will to topple the regime and rebuild Cambodia. While the author certifies that “comrade Xim demonstrates a morally good attitude towards the people”, he also states that he occasionally appears “conciliatory, craven and undecided”.

Som Rin is no other than Heng Samrin, who today chairs Cambodia's National Assembly and who is honorary president of the CPP. When the Vietnamese wrote the dossier, Heng Samrin and Chea Sim led the Kampuchean United Front for National Salvation, which was founded in December 1978. After the fall of the Pol Pot regime, Heng Samrin was promoted to chairman of the People's Revolutionary Council of the People's Republic of Kampuchea in 1979 and chairman of the Council of State and secretary-general of the People's Revolutionary Party two years later. Born as Heng Him in 1934, under Pol Pot he was commander of a military division – one of the highest positions held by all of those who fled the Khmer Rouge.

“He is a sincere man and honoured by many cadres due to his comprehension,” the dossier said of Heng Him. However, “[he] has a low education, does not talk a lot and sometimes he has an inferiority complex... his political understanding is limited”. The file finishes with the remark that “Rin” can absorb higher tasks once he has completed further education. From the vantage point of the present, one can only assume that Heng Samrin was successful in doing that.

Others were not so fortunate. Pen Sovan, Cambodia's first prime minister after Pol Pot, was sacked after five months on the job and imprisoned in Vietnam for more than ten years. However, Pen Sovan's file does not reveal any hint of reservation against him or any expectation of dissent.

In contrast, the file on Hor Nam Hong, who has been Cambodia's minister of foreign affairs for 15 years, discloses evidence that sheds light on a historic dispute regarding his role during the Pol Pot regime. Current opposition leader



On paper: Hor Nam Hong's file in dossier MfS - HA II Nr. 38135 says that he was the director of Boeung Trabek re-education centre in which he was interned during the Khmer Rouge. Hor Nam Hong - Cambodia's foreign minister - has always denied that he was the director of the prison camp.



Sam Rainsy, who has been in self-imposed exile for more than three years, has maintained that Hor Nam Hong was the director of a prison during the Khmer Rouge – a claim the minister has always rejected, asserting that he was only a common prisoner. According to the dossier, Hor Nam Hong was interned in the Boeung Trabek re-education centre – a Khmer Rouge prison for VIPs – alongside other former diplomats in February 1977.

“As the director of the camp, H. N. Hong is just the same prisoner as the others. However, it is easier for him and he can present the situation in the camp to Ieng Sary during his inspections,” the dossier reads.

Bou Thong, deputy prime minister in the 1980s, is described as “intelligent, inventive at work, resolute with good organisational skills”, while his “undemocratic behaviour” and “false ambition” are noted as weaknesses.

The dossier on Cambodia's long-serving prime minister Hun Sen reveals that his “correct name is Hun Bonal. When he came to Vietnam, he called himself Hai Phúc.” In *Hun Sen: Strongman of Cambodia* the authors Harish C. Mehta and Julie B. Metha quote Hun Sen as saying the following in 1997: “I had to disguise myself as a person from Laos... They gave my name as Mai Phuc (meaning happiness forever), aged 26, a high-ranking cadre from Region X.” The reason cited for the new identity was to not “attract attention or give rise to suspicion”. As the book is based on statements made by Hun Sen that were not verified, this explanation for his name change can be questioned.

A commander by age 26, Hun Sen had had an extraordinary military career. Three months following his escape to Vietnam in June 1977, Cambodia launched a vicious attack on the Vietnamese city of Tây Ninh, deeply straining relations with Vietnam. Perhaps it was for this reason that Hun Sen did not

wish to be identified as a former commander of a Cambodian regiment that had nearly 2,000 soldiers along the border. However, Hai Phúc is neither a Laotian or Khmer name, but instead Vietnamese. Is it possible that Hun Sen wanted to demonstrate solidarity with his new allies by changing his name according to their language?

There are few doubts about the veracity of the folder



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The dossier also addresses Hun Sen's family background. Following his escape to Vietnam, Hun Sen was separated from his wife Bun Rany (born Sam Heang). A few days after she had given birth to their second child, Bun Rany, as the wife of a deserter, was taken into Khmer Rouge custody. Prior to their reunion in Phnom Penh in February 1979, both had received a message that the other was dead and Hun Sen had been introduced to a young woman whom he wanted to marry. The dossier says, “However, when his wife (Bun Rany) came back, he broke off with her resolutely and took her... to the Embassy of Kampuchea in Hanoi.”

While the Stasi archives centre has blacked out the name of the woman to protect her personal rights, the German documentation centre – through these dossiers – has once again shed light on the secret communist world prior to 1989. ■

The Stasi Files

The communist regime in East Germany created an extensive intelligence service. Until its closure in 1990, the Ministry of State Security (Stasi - Ministerium für Staatssicherheit) was one of the most effective and repressive intelligence and secret police agencies in the world. It consigned 39m file cards and 111 kilometres of folders. The Stasi's main target was East German residents, who were kept under constant surveillance by up to 91,000 official and

189,000 unofficial staffers and spies. In addition, the Stasi also coordinated intelligence operations abroad, primarily in West Germany.

After German reunification in 1990, the federal parliament redacted the Stasi dossiers and gave citizens the opportunity to see their files. Scholars and journalists are allowed to investigate the files for their own research. To protect the personal rights of ordinary individuals, some information has not been made public. ■

Photos: Valerie Kuypers/AFP; MfS - HA II Nr. 38135, Federal Commissioner Preserving the Records of the State Security Service of the former German Democratic Republic;



Political : the Stasi museum is housed in the former head office of East Germany's Ministry of State Security; the MfS - HA II Nr. 38135 folder analyses Khmer Rouge officers who defected to Vietnam in the late 1970s

