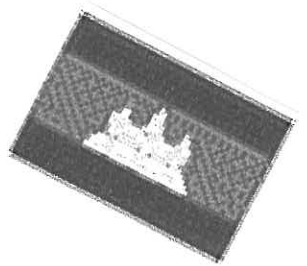


Research Assignment: Cambodia



Struggle for the Economy
'People Want Change'



Can Cambodia Be Saved?

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Period 3
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The Mission of UNTAC in Cambodia

While some people claim that the peace keeping operation in Cambodia was the UN's most successful venture, there are others who maintain that it was a "three billion dollar boondoggle" (Prasso 36). In fairness to both opinions, it is well to recognize that the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia or UNTAC had a monumental task with a \$1.8 billion budget and 20,000 personnel. There were bound to be some things that would go right and some things that would go wrong. The impact of the UN's peace keeping venture in Cambodia will continue to be studied in terms of its ultimate success as the years go by. Most importantly, through the assistance of the UN, Cambodia experienced its first free elections, but Cambodia still has many things yet to learn about the proper functioning of a democracy.

In the way of background, because of the break-up of the Soviet Union, Russian support of Vietnam and Cambodia had disappeared overnight, and Vietnam withdrew from Cambodia in September 1989. In this new atmosphere, peace negotiations took place in Paris at which a peace agreement was signed in October 1991 with all Cambodian parties agreeing to disarm their forces, to allow the UN to occupy the country, and to conduct new elections. This peace agreement led to the largest UN peacekeeping mission in history, and it was organized into seven major components: military, civilian police, electoral, human rights, rehabilitation, repatriation, and civil administration. The major accomplishment of UNTAC was the election, successfully held in 1993, despite a boycott by the Khmer Rouge.

Under the Paris agreements, UNTAC had certain goals as follows: to demobilize or disarm the armed forces of the State of Cambodia, Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge, FUNCINPEC, and the KPNLF (Khmer People's National Liberation Front); take "direct control or supervision" of the political administrative structure they had put in place; liberalize the country's political climate by "fostering an environment in which respect for human rights [would] be ensured"; and then organize "free and fair elections." (Heder 427). Despite the challenges UNTAC faced, they did accomplish many of their goals. As a matter of fact, about 96 percent of the eligible population registered to vote, and despite violent threats from the Khmer Rouge to attack polling sites, just under 90 percent of registered voters went to the polls in May, 1993 to vote. The elections sponsored by UNTAC were peaceful and successful, but since Hun Sen's

communist party, CPP (Cambodian People's Party), would not honor the election results (which failed to give a two-thirds majority to one party), Prince Norodom Ranariddh became first prime minister and Hun Sen second prime minister with King Sihanouk as head of state. This sharing of power in Cambodia under a new constitutional monarchy ended the UNTAC mandate.

Prior to the occupation of the UN, "more than one-half million Cambodian refugees had fled the country, some 200,000 had resettled in western countries, but another 350,000 had remained in refugee camps along the Thai-Cambodian border" (Ledgerwood 3). There was not much left of the infrastructure of Cambodia, and disease and unemployment were rampant. "Foreign owned factories were fronts for drug-smuggling and money laundering" (*The Economist*, Jan. 18, 1997). The institutional structure of Cambodia was one that descended from "bossism" and political labeling that made the Cambodians prone to violence to achieve their ends. After two decades of communistic rule, their system had been one in which power is held by "a minority of persons who are specially qualified to govern by reason of their superior knowledge" (Heder 426). The UN essentially was trying to give birth to democracy in a country that still had a diluted Leninist regime and which had failed economically. In other words, everything including government had to be built from the bottom up.

After the UN vehicles were gone from Cambodian roads, there was a sense of relative calm in the city. The UN military forces had left behind a weakened but undefeated Khmer Rouge, that would continue to fight the new government from the jungles bordering Thailand. Within the fragile coalition government, political insiders consolidated their power networks in various governmental ministries and Phnom Penh became a quieter place. For two years after the elections, there was a fragile peace as leaders worked together to rebuild their nation.

In terms of its goals, UNTAC had successfully engineered historic, democratic, free, and fair elections for the first time in Cambodia. Education in the democratic process and in how free elections are held were sent out over the radio waves instructing the people. People emerged more knowledgeable and hopeful for their country's future. UNTAC forces succeeded in providing a sense of security throughout the country. Rehabilitation projects began, including repair of the country's main highways. Economically, "the huge influx of capital from the UN

mission provided a much needed boost to the Cambodian economy, and payments to local Cambodian staff throughout the country meant that some of this money reached the local level” (Ledgerwood 6). One of the saddest things about the UN occupation, however, is that even after the UN left, some sporadic fighting continued. UNTAC was unsuccessful in disarming all the combatants. To disarm an entire country of four warring factions that had never known elections may have been impossible. Nevertheless, UNTAC had put Cambodia on the road to a new chapter in her history.

In addition, UNTAC successfully moved 370,000 refugees from camps in Thailand, just over the border, back to Cambodia. They were no longer a burden on the Thai government. However, UN evaluations of the progress of these refugees a year later in Cambodia reported a high rate of poverty, infant mortality, and disease. It is questionable then how successful ultimately was the commitment to repatriate people in conditions of safety and to provide them with land for survival. Refugees were being returned to areas where there was still fighting, and “land mines still [rendered] large portions of land unusable, as they [continued] to blow the limbs off hundreds of civilians every month” (Prasso 38).

While disarmament and violence in Cambodia remained the greatest unsolved problem for UNTAC, the fact that a free, fair election was held in 1993 (after UNTAC had prepared Cambodia for it) and that elections hopefully will be held also in the future are steps in the right direction. It will take time for Cambodia to learn the fine points of tolerance, respect, and human rights that go with a democracy and the democratic process, but the foundation has been laid. Time and international pressures are on her side for ultimate success.

Good

Hope In and For Cambodia

Is there hope for Cambodia to emerge from her ashes, her violence, and her chaos? Certainly, she cannot do it alone. Both ASEAN and the United Nations, with their economic influences and their human rights positions, can impact the course of events in Cambodia. This lends hope to the Cambodians inside Cambodia and to those looking with hope from the outside for a brighter future there.

Currently, Cambodia is "relying on a multiparty democratic system" to ensure the country's "perpetual advance to progress, prosperity, affluence and glory" (Heder 425). On March 30, 1998, Prince Ranariddh was welcomed back to Cambodia on a visit, after 9 months of exile in Bangkok, with all charges and fines dropped. Also, Sam Rainsy, a revolutionary for social improvements, when interviewed, said "I am willing and prepared to talk to anybody in order to bring about peace, national reconciliation and democracy... We have to implement basic reforms in order to put this country back on its feet" (*Asiaweek*, April 10, 1998). Hun Sen, currently in power, recognizes that Prince Ranariddh's participation in Cambodia's governmental processes is a minimum requirement for credible polls in the next election. He has agreed to abide by the results of the next election. The newly formed government of Cambodia is still learning her painful lessons to respect the electoral process which is the foundation of a democratic nation, but she is making more progress since the beginning of 1998.

What are the events of the past five years since the election of 1993? In the last five years since the first election in Cambodia, there have continued some insurrections and bloodshed. Although the UN mission in Cambodia did succeed in inculcating a reasonable understanding of what democracy means, the Cambodians with their violent history still have much to learn about the democratic process. Subsequent to the election of 1993, a coalition government (to avoid civil war) was set up with Prince Ranariddh and Hun Sen serving as "first prime minister" and "second prime minister" respectively. The other ministries were shared equally between FUNCINPEC and the CPP (Cambodian People's Party). However, at the lower levels the CPP remained overwhelmingly in control of the administration. In 1994, Prince Ranariddh removed his minister of economy and finance, Sam Rainsy, because his zealous pursuits of fiscal reform threatened many CPP interests and his outspoken

ministers. Later Rainsy was expelled from FUNCINPEC and illegally removed from parliament. The Royal Government of Cambodia succeeded in quieting some Cambodian human rights and other nongovernmental organizations that had dared to speak out critically in the immediate post-UNTAC period. Thus, the new democratic monarchy had not learned yet the value of tolerance and criticism that goes with the free enterprise system. By 1996, political tensions had heightened throughout Cambodia, and on June 17, 1997 Sam Rainsy found himself in the middle of fighting in Phnom Penh. On July 2 and 3, 1997, Hun Sen staged a coup and the total disintegration of the royal government. He declared martial law on July 6, 1997, and Prince Ranariddh, his arch rival, fled into Thailand. Hun Sen claims that he had to move against the prince because he was breaking the law. Specifically, Hun Sen argues that the prince was smuggling weapons into the country and he was dealing with the hardline Khmer Rouge in the northwest corner of Cambodia. Prince Ranariddh later remarked that he would not recognize any court decisions on these charges, and he claimed that he had been naïve in thinking that no one would actually use force to change the political structure of the new country. He said, "I thought that nobody would dare do it, because the people of Cambodia had suffered so much - the American war, genocide, war of occupation. I was so naïve...I was not strong enough in trying to implement real democracy" (*Asiaweek*, Mar. 13, 1998).

Prince Ranariddh pointed out that Hun Sen had expected everyone would forget Prince Ranariddh 48 hours after the coup, that he would be a part of ASEAN and would be able to sit at the UN. However, this violent coup after Cambodia's democratic election was not respected internationally. Cambodia was not accepted into ASEAN, and Cambodia's UN seat will be kept vacant until a democratically elected government emerges. The World Bank, the IMF and the ADB all closed their doors. The Japanese also cut off aid. Under mediation with the Japanese, Prince Ranariddh finally was granted a pardon from King Sihanouk, his father, and Hun Sen did an about-face in his position toward Ranariddh. As mentioned earlier, Prince Ranariddh returned on March 30, 1998 to Cambodia after 9 months of exile in Bangkok with all his charges and fines dropped by the government of Cambodia. Ranariddh takes comfort that significant grassroots support for FUNCINPEC still exists, partially because it is considered the most promising alternative after the years of austere communistic rule by Hun Sen. Most important for the royalist party is the

affection and respect for King Sihanouk, and his presence during the next election should be a stabilizing influence.

Although the threat of violence is never far away, there is the underlying cry now for economic reforms in the interest of survival. These economic reforms demand that people work together. International monitoring of Cambodia's activities likewise require that the leaders work together. Hun Sen and Ranariddh may be forced to live and work together in the same country for the urgent and common purposes of the people. Because the country is broke, there is no money anymore for weapons and fighting. Besides the tourism slump, trade has suffered so greatly, and tax receipts have dried up. The police and the army are not all being paid. In addition, "the World Bank and IMF have cut their budgetary support because of the plundering of the country's forests to fill personal or political pockets. Some bilateral donors have pulled out. Aid workers worry that, as a result of German cuts, medicines will run out" (*The Economist*, Nov. 1, 1997).

The entire infrastructure of Cambodia has to be rebuilt. Chris Ho, a Malaysian businessman, launched in 1997 a campaign to promote Cambodia which he called "Back in Business and Seeing is Believing" (*The Economist*, Nov. 1, 1997). Already, he can point to some signs of comfort to foreigners, such as the following: armed soldiers are less in evidence, tinted windows protecting criminals in cars have been banned, money-gathering road-blocks have been dismantled, girls doing traditional dances will meet visitors at Phnom Penh airport, and immigration officers will be taught not to scowl and to drop their illegal rackets in visa fees. As of late 1997, most hotels in Phnom Penh and Siem Reap were deserted, but Phnom Penh's Pochentong airport had reopened, and King Sihanouk had returned. After returning to Cambodia, Sihanouk awarded royal decorations to eight UN human rights workers and to one representative from Amnesty International. Singapore's Raffles Holdings Company has resumed work on two hotel projects, and over 30 garment factories are back operating. In addition, "Caltex is carrying on with an \$8 million fuel depot in Sihanoukville, and Total recently opened a propane bottling plant" (*Asiaweek*, Sept. 12, 1997).

In the last several years, it's clear that the brutal communist movement has been losing strength and splitting apart for years. Steve Heder, one of the world's leading experts on the Khmer Rouge has said of Pol Pot's regime, "This time it really

does look like the end” (*Newsweek*, June 30, 1997). In the last week, Pol Pot, the genius of genocide in Cambodia, has died. According to CNN News, Hun Sen is now ruling with a heavy hand, and he is offering amnesty to Khmer Rouge leftovers so that they can be integrated into the country peaceably. Although several hundred Khmer Rouge guerrillas are still in the jungle, they are not a threat to the present government. An important question remaining is whether or not Cambodia can rebuild her nation after having lost an entire generation of educated people. Now, with the death of Pol Pot and the possible cooperation between Prince Ranariddh and Hun Sen and other political factions, hopefully Cambodia’s leaders will look to the future and strive for the resurrection of education and industry.

The international community exerts a big influence now in Cambodia, since trade is a big issue for survival and restoration in Southeast Asia. Cambodia needs trading partners. She cannot survive without the assents of ASEAN and the UN. To be in good standing with ASEAN and the UN, the Cambodians and all their leaders involved in the new democratic election process must cooperate in fairness, with tolerance, and without violence. As the world grows smaller these days and all nations become interdependent for economic survival, Cambodia will have to conform to the world’s new democratic principles. It is only a matter of time. Yes, there is hope now within and for Cambodia.

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This is quite good.

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