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TEARS AND WOUNDS OF CAMBODIA

THE KHMER ROUGE GENOCIDE AND THE ROLE OF FOREIGN
ACTORS

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The future
world of our dreams
can't be built on the
corruptions of the past.

Tear it down – Rupi Kaur

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation offers an in-depth analysis of the Cambodian genocide perpetrated by the Khmer Rouge between 1975 and 1979, with a focus on the external causes and foreign actors that influenced, supported, and eventually led to the rise of the Khmer Rouge and the realization of such genocide. Divided into three parts based on the timeline of the genocide—before, during, and after—the aim is not a historical account but an exploration of the reasons behind the events. The study examines the geopolitical, ideological, and historical factors that contributed to the rise of the Khmer Rouge and the subsequent atrocities committed during their regime.

The dissertation aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics at play. It explores the role of major powers including the United States, the Soviet Union, China, Vietnam, France, and the United Nations in shaping the events leading up to, during, and after the genocide.

The study also addresses key research questions aimed at uncovering the reasons behind the rise of the Khmer Rouge, the practices adopted from other communist regimes during the genocide, and the international response to the aftermath of the genocide. The research questions are: “How the international actors affected and determined the rise of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia?”; “Which practices of other communist regimes did the Khmer Rouge apply during the genocide? Which are the analogies with other regimes?”; “In which way the international actors reacted to the post-genocide situation? And how did they involve themselves in the reconstruction of this wounded country?”. By examining these questions, the study seeks to shed light on the broader implications of the Cambodian genocide for global politics, human rights, and international intervention.

Ultimately, the dissertation aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the Cambodian genocide and its lasting impact on Cambodia and the international community, seeking to provide new insights into one of the most tragic events of the 20th century.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ASEAN = Association of South East Asian Nations

CIA = Central Intelligence Agency

CGDK = Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea

COSVN HQ = Elusive headquarters Central Office for South Vietnam

CPK = Communist Party of Kampuchea

CPP = Cambodian People's Party

DK = Democratic Kampuchea

ECCC = Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia

FUNCINPEC = United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful, and Cooperative Cambodia

FUNK = National United Front of Kampuchea

GLF = Great Leap Forward

ICK = International Conference on Kampuchea

INF = Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces

KPNLF = Khmer People's National Liberation Front

NATO = North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NVN = North Vietnamese

PDK = Party of Democratic Kampuchea

PRK = People's Republic of Kampuchea

PRPK = People's Revolutionary Party of Kampuchea

NC = Supreme National Council

UN = United Nations

UNTAC = United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia

U.S. = United States

VC = Viet Cong

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation is an analysis of the Cambodian genocide, perpetrated by the Khmer Rouge between 1975 and 1979. The analysis is divided in three parts based on the timeline of the genocide: before, during and after. However, the aim of the thesis is not a historical account of what happened during the Genocide, but an analysis of external causes and foreign actors that, directly or indirectly influenced, supported, instigated and eventually led to the realization of such Genocide.

Specifically, this thesis focuses on a defined group of actors — the United States, the Soviet Union, China, Vietnam, France (during the pre-genocidal period and post-colonial era), and the United Nations (in the aftermath of the genocide) —which significantly influenced Cambodia during the time period under examination. Indeed, these countries, through the influence of their foreign policies, played a role in facilitating the ascent of the Khmer Rouge and supported their regime later. It was King Norodom Sihanouk that, in 1967, coined the term “Khmer Rouge” to address his communist opponents.

On April 17, 1975, the Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK), led by Pol Pot, took control of Cambodia. During this time, the Khmer Rouge implemented radical social, economic, and political reforms aimed at creating an agrarian communist society. These policies resulted in widespread forced labor, mass executions, torture, and starvation, leading to the deaths of approximately 1/3 of the population. This period is referred as Cambodian genocide.

The reason behind the decision of developing a master thesis on the Cambodian genocide originated in a trip I made in September 2022 to Cambodia and Vietnam, during which I became aware of the Cambodian genocide and the Khmer Rouge regime. The matter that stunned me the most was the role of the UN in dealing with this issue, especially after the genocide. I wished to understand what caused things to turn out as they did. I wanted to understand why the UN turned its back to a population that survived a genocide and, instead of protecting them from their perpetrators, the UN allied with them. Why for 27 years the genocide was ignored rather than condemned. No political faction or ideology should ever overshadow the justice for a genocide.

I conducted the literature review starting from the happenings of the genocide during the regime and then expanding the focus on before and after the rise and fall of the Khmer Rouge. During my research I noticed how the already existing literature focuses on the chronological events of the rise of the Khmer Rouge, on the violence of the totalitarian practices implemented by the regime, and on the political dispute between the Vietnamese faction that freed the country from the regime that, however, continued to resist the “foreign occupation”. I noticed that the holes in the literature corresponded to the question that I was posing to myself while studying the topic.

From this consideration came the idea to not focus on the historical facts of the genocide, but rather on the reasons for which history became such. I preferred a different approach to the issue, based on why and how the events happened, while questioning the role of foreign actors that I previously mentioned.

Could the genocide be avoided? What were the reasons of the rise of the Khmer Rouge? Why the UN legitimated the government of the Khmer Rouge? Why the trials to the Khmer Rouge formally started only in 2006?

From the information included up to this point, three research questions emerged. Each question covers a chapter of this dissertation, as previously mentioned, and they can be outlined as follows: “How the international actors affected and determined the rise of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia?”. This research question aims to understand the reasons and the events that led to the rise of the Khmer Rouge. Since the independence from the French colonization in 1953, Cambodia had to face several challenges, including the succession of wars, that deteriorated the already fragile post-independence condition.

The second research question can be framed into: “Which practices of other communist regimes did the Khmer Rouge apply during the genocide? Which are the analogies with other regimes?”. These research questions are designed to investigate the parallels and influences of other communist regimes that were implemented in the actions and intentions of the Khmer Rouge throughout their governance. One illustrative example is the emulation of the constitution of Khmer farming communities, which mirrors the principles of both the “Great Leap Forward” initiated by Mao Zedong in communist China and the Stalin’s extensive use of violence.

The third research question covers the aftermath of the genocide and the response of the international organizations and foreign countries to the events. It includes the controversies and the civil war that erupted right after the liberation of the Cambodian people from the Khmer Rouge regime. Lastly it will cover the trials that prosecuted the leaders of the Khmer Rouge. The research question can be outlined as: “In which way the international actors reacted to the post-genocide situation? And how did they involve themselves in the reconstruction of this wounded country?”.

In summary, the initial segment of the thesis will examine the events and foreign actors that culminated in the genocide, analyzing the historical framework since the independence of Cambodia from the French colonization in 1953. In order to understand some later developments of this dissertation, it is necessary to introduce a brief but complete historical framework of Cambodia starting from the colonial period of Indochina, the transition for independence and both the first Indochina War (1946-1954) and the second one (1955-1975). Indeed, the Second Indochina War is crucial for the understanding of how the Communist Party of Kampuchea was able to raise to power.

The second chapter will delve into an analysis of the practices and measures implemented by the CPK during its regime. This will include an in-depth look at the collectivization of land and the establishment of agricultural collectives, the formation of two new social classes, and the generally severe treatment of its citizens, accompanied by a significant degree of violence.

The chapter covers the Khmer Rouge’s seizure of power, the mass evacuation from urban areas to the countryside, along with the repercussions of this migration and the duration of the regime’s rule. It provides an overview of the organization’s structure during this period and the repressive policies against the enemies of the Party.

Furthermore, an ideological framework of the Communist Party of Kampuchea and its leader will be provided, exploring how analogies of other communist regimes can be identified in the actions and policies of the Khmer Rouge regime.

The third chapter will concentrate on the aftermath of the genocide, in particular on how the dynamics of the Cold War shaped the international response towards the genocide and exacerbated the struggle between the citizens of Cambodia and the Khmer Rouge.

Indeed, the international factions prevented a smooth and fast resolution of the conflict further complicating the delicate balances within the country. Due to the international turmoil and the alignment of major international actors either in favor of or against the Khmer Rouge, the issue of the genocide would not be addressed until 1997.

With the downfall of the Soviet Union, and consequently the Khmer Rouge regime, the international actors and the United Nations tried to re-establish a political order, with the implementation of a provisional United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia. However, various foreign actors seized the opportunity to establish their political and commercial foothold in Cambodia, despite the vulnerability the Cambodian population was undergoing.

The information and data used to answer these questions and to further develop this dissertation is based on existing primary and secondary literature, that represent the theoretical background of this dissertation. The primary literature consists in materials sourced from the Wilson Centre Digital Archive, the digital library of the United Nations, the CIA FOIA, the Yale University Genocide Studies Program and a publication by the Documentation Centre of Cambodia regarding the historical events of the genocide.

Regarding the secondary sources, numerous studies of international authors were included, that comprehend both the Cambodian history and the communist ideology, in order to provide a more precise and a wider overview from which extrapolate more accurate information on the extremely complex matter.

In 2018, the UN formally ruled as genocide the acts committed by the Khmer Rouge against the Muslim Cham and the Vietnamese minority. However, there is a debate, among historians, about the fact that what happened in Cambodia cannot be exactly defined as a genocide. This could be due to the complex definition of genocide. The definition of the crime of genocide occurred in 1948, at the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide and became integral part of international law. Article II of the Genocide Convention defines the crime of genocide:

“In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

- a) *Killing members of the group;*
- b) *Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;*
- c) *Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;*
- d) *Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;*
- e) *Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.”*

(United Nations, 1948)

Article I of the Genocide Convention states that the crime of genocide could take place either in the context of armed conflicts or in situations of peace.

The Khmer Rouge forced the population of Cambodia to leave their homes in the city in order to constitute and work in agricultural cooperatives. People were deprived of their basic rights, there was no money, private property, school, free market, religion, foreign clothes or medicine.

The Communist Party of Kampuchea forbade public gatherings and the freedom of movement, no one was allowed to leave their assigned area. In particular, CPK targeted anyone cooperating with the previous government: the Khmer Republic regime, a military dictatorship headed by Marshal Lon Nol and backed by the United States. Soldiers, military officers and even civil servants belonging, or that served under, the previous government were persecuted and killed.

The Khmer Rouge aimed to create a rural, equal and pure society, with no classes, no rich or poor people and no exploitation. In doing so, the rights and freedom of Cambodian citizens were extremely limited and it implied the persecution of the “different”. Minority people were the most obvious targeted as the Cham, Vietnamese and Chinese people were imprisoned and executed but there were also less obvious targets.

In fact, the creation of Democratic Kampuchea’s equal society had no place for rich, smart or learned people. Anyone wearing glasses was considered an intellectual and therefore was killed, together with people speaking foreign languages. Obviously, anyone against, opposed or noncompliant to the regime was immediately executed. People refusing to

leave their house were executed, along with anyone disobeying the orders or considered suspicious.

The extension of the people persecuted by the Khmer Rouge regime could be a reason why, according to some, it is difficult to properly define it as genocide. Another reason could be the fact that the definition of genocide in Article II explicates: “*following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group*” (United Nations, 1948).

However, The definition of genocide leaves a grey area of people that were still persecuted and killed without actually belonging to the previously cited groups. Indeed, the convention does not cover political groups or, in this specific case, people wearing glasses, wealthy and able to speak a foreign language.

There are two differing opinions that shape the debate. The first one is based on the fact that the civilians that perished under the CPK regime could have been killed either due to the circumstances in which they were living or due to the localized undisciplined and vengeful peasant army (Craig, 2005, p. 78).

The other opinion focuses on the fact that violence was centralized, effectively planned and ordered from the high representatives of the party. The debate was resolved by a discovery of the Documentation Center of Cambodia, that uncovered internal security document of the Khmer Rouge. The documents demonstrated how the violence committed during the regime was in fact ordered by the highest political authorities of the Communist Party of Kampuchea.

Regardless, the Khmer Rouge killed approximately 1/3 of the Cambodian population. It is difficult to calculate the exact number of victims as the estimates of the number of people who died under Pol Pot’s regime vary. According to a national survey conducted by the People’s Republic of Kampuchea (1979-1989) 3.3 million people died.

The historian Ben Kiernan estimated that 1.5 million people died during Democratic Kampuchea (Kiernan, *The Pol Pot Regime: Race, Power and Genocide in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge, 1975–1979*, 1996). He later stated that demographers rectified the number to 1.7 million deaths.

The U.S. Central Intelligence Agency in 1980, in turn, estimated 1.4 million victims (Central Intelligence Agency, 1980). Historian Michel Vickery based his estimation excluding people that would have died of natural causes, considering the context they were living in, resulting in the lowest number of victims approximately only 740,000 people (Vickery, 1984). Vickery was among the historians supporting the first theory of the previously mentioned debate.

It is important to consider the context in which all these facts happened: the Cold War. During the Cold War period, the attention was focused on the hotspots, such as Vietnam and Afghanistan. The Vietnam war draw the attention of the world. In the fight against their enemies the United States took countermeasures that went over the borders of Vietnam.

The shilling of Cambodia and Laos at the hands of the United States contributed to worsen the already precarious situation in Cambodia. Moreover, the withdrawal and defeat of the United States in 1975, disengaged the fight against communism in Indochina, paving the way for the rise of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia. Similarly, the Soviet Union invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, diverted the attention from what was happening in Cambodia. As Henry Locard mentions in his book, the Priority of the United States in that period was not the condemnation of the crimes of the Khmer Rouge.

The United States, in trying to win the Chinese support against the URSS and pursuing its foreign policy against the North Vietnamese, supported the Khmer Rouge overlooking their crimes (Locard, 2005, p. 135). The U.S. encouraged the Chinese to support Pol Pot's regime both economically and militarily. Kissinger was aware of the crimes committed by the Khmer Rouge, however, the Cold War's alliances overshadowed justice.

The amnesia involved the United Nations as well, that assigned Cambodia's seat in the United Nations to the Khmer Rouge that were exiled in the mountains, rather than to the People's Republic of Kampuchea, the government that overthrew the genocidal regime. This controversy lasted until 1991, year that marks the collapse of the Soviet Union and, consequently, the Cold War ended.

However, the trials of the Khmer Rouge representatives began only in 1997 and developed very slowly, indeed as mentioned before, the convictions for the crimes only

happened in 2018. Another controversy regarding the trials was the fact that only the living representatives of the Communist Party of Kampuchea were put on trial, by the time the trials were organized Pol Pot had died of old age in 1998.

In 2015, among the Khmer Rouge awaiting trial, Sou Met¹ died and the investigation against him was terminated (Documentation Center of Cambodia, 2020, p. 88). This event unleashed protests among Cambodians and International Organizations as it was considered improper and unreasonable to only persecute the members that were still alive. However, due to its complexity, this matter will be further developed in the following chapters.

¹ Sou Met was a prominent figure during the Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia. He served as the governor of the Khmer Rouge-controlled region of Siem Reap Province, which included the famous Angkor Wat temple complex. Sou Met gained notoriety for his role in implementing the policies of the Khmer Rouge, including forced labor, executions, and other human rights abuses. He was known for his ruthless enforcement of Khmer Rouge ideology and was implicated in numerous atrocities committed during that time. After the fall of the Khmer Rouge regime, Sou Met fled and lived in hiding for many years. However, he was arrested in 1999 and eventually tried and convicted for his crimes by the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC), commonly known as the Khmer Rouge Tribunal.

1. THE NEVERENDING WAR IN INDOCHINA

When the Khmer rouge took power on the 17th of April 1975, Cambodia was already a shattered country. The recent history of Indochina is marked by several wars, not only the regional conflicts for the establishment of borders, but it was dragged into world conflicts due to its belonging to colonial empires, and Cambodia is not exempted.

The French colonization of Cambodia started as a protectorate in 1863, when King Norodom sought the protection of the French hoping to gain the upper hand over Siam (today's Thailand). Indeed Cambodia was a weak state, the king feared an invasion or an attack from the neighboring countries Vietnam and Siam. In order to protect his country, the king thought it was necessary to ally with someone more powerful, that could help him to keep his opponents at bay. In August 1863, King Norodom signed the agreement to establish a French protectorate over Cambodia, the agreement included not only the French protection but also trade benefits between the countries.

However, Cambodia was administered as part of the French colony until 1953. During the protectorate the role and power of the king weakened with time until 1884, when king Norodom was forced to sign a new agreement and to abdicate. Following the king's abdication, the French aimed to carry out a project involving the full annexation of Cambodia, managing it as a colonial territory.

The scheme failed before it could start due to a Cambodian uprising against the French that escalated into a guerrilla that spread towards Siam and Annam, triggering a huge French retribution towards the rebels and whoever supported them. Subsequent to the revolt the French decided to alter the nature of Cambodia modernizing it. By the early 1900s the French administrative, postal and coinage system were thoroughly assimilated into Cambodian society.

During World War I, Cambodia participated alongside France either through enlistment or involvement in labor corps or in munitions factories in France. World War II weakened the French protectorate in Cambodia, and when France collapsed to Germany in 1940 the Siamese took advantage of the situation in order to expand their borders. Siam managed to invade part of Laos and Cambodia invading exactly the territories subjected to the French protectorate, angering the Cambodians due to the inability of the French to remain

committed to the agreement. The Japanese mediated the ceasefire but the occupied territories remained under Siam's control.

During World War II Japan started to spread its colonial power to Indochina as well, establishing some headquarters in the region. However, towards the win of the Allies in 1945 the U.S.A. started to target the Japanese outposts in Indochina. March 9, 1945, witnessed the Japanese taking command of Phnom Penh and the entirety of French Indochina.

On March 13 King Sihanouk, under the specific request of the Japanese, officially proclaimed Cambodia as the independent Kingdom of Kampuchea, nullifying the Franco-Cambodian agreements. However, the independence was only recognized 8 years later. Indeed, following the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki on August 14, Japan surrendered, and according to an agreement among the Allies, Cambodia (along with the entire Indochina region) was slated to be restored to French control. However, due to the lack of French forces in the region, the British were designated to ensure south Vietnam and Cambodia.

The return of the French was not looked favorably in the eyes of Cambodians. The declaration of Cambodia's independence and the diminished influence of France rendered the French incapable of reinstating the level of authority they held prior to the Second World War.

Indeed, On January 7, 1946, France entered into a *modus vivendi* agreement – an agreement or arrangement between parties that allows them to coexist peacefully, often on a temporary or provisional basis – with the Cambodian government, through which Cambodia would be accorded autonomy. With the reinstatement of the French protectorate Siam returned the occupied provinces of Siem Reap and Battambang.

The following step was deciding to conduct elections in order to form a Constituent Assembly responsible for determining a Constitution. Subsequently, elections for a National Assembly, vested with substantial authority over events and developments in Cambodia, could take place. Finally on November 8, 1949, France transferred all authority to the Cambodians, except in the realms of military affairs and foreign relations through the Franco-Cambodian Agreement. In this period marked by political instability,

Cambodia lacked a secure government. The National Assembly and the position of Prime Minister were both precarious, with fluctuating support.

In mid-1953, as the French faced evident setbacks in the military conflict in Vietnam, they opted to negotiate with King Sihanouk. In exchange for granting Cambodia independence, Sihanouk would ensure the protection of French property in the country. Sihanouk readily accepted the terms, considering it a modest cost for gaining independence.

On November 8, 1953, France officially conferred "full and satisfactory" independence upon Cambodia. France decided to give up Cambodia and Laos in an attempt to preserve its influence in Vietnam. However, the battle of Dien Bien Phu marked a decisive victory for the Viet Minh forces over the French, leading to the end of French involvement in Indochina and contributing to the Geneva Accords – convened to address the issues in both Korea and Indochina – which temporarily divided Vietnam along the 17th parallel into North and South Vietnam.

France was an important external actor for Cambodia, however, even though it was supposed to be a protectorate, the French did not miss the chance to engage in colonization efforts seeking to establish control and influence over Cambodia as well. Nevertheless, the French protectorate was not pacific nor accepted by Cambodians, especially during the colonization phase of the protectorate. Indeed, during this period, there were numerous rebellions and uprisings against the French, many of which contributed to develop nationalist movements in the country.

1.1. THE VIETNAM WAR

In order to answer to the first research question: “How the international actors affected and determined the rise of the Khmer rouge in Cambodia?” and understand the situations that led to the rise of the Khmer Rouge, it is necessary to start from the Vietnam War. The Vietnam War was not limited to the borders of Vietnam only, but deeply influenced the neighboring countries. It was one of the hotspots of the Cold War and, due to the actors involved, the factions of the war and the secrecy of determined operations implemented, it was extremely complicated.

After the Geneva Convention that, as mentioned before, divided Vietnam into North and South, the truce only lasted for two years. The United States and the Soviet Union were competing against each other in order to control spheres of influence around the world. One of those spheres of influence was Vietnam. The Vietnam war is crucial to understand the events in Cambodia even if the country declared itself neutral and did not take any active part in the war.

Two factions emerged during the Vietnam War: the Soviet Union and China supported North Vietnam, led by Ho Chi Minh and the Communist Party, that aimed to reunify the country under a single communist government; while the U.S.A. sided with South Vietnam, that sought to maintain its independence and resist communist unification.

The division stemmed from the ideological contrast between a communist state and a democracy. However, President Ngo Dinh Diem was not widely regarded as a democratic leader. While his government was initially established under the framework of a democratic republic, Diem's regime became increasingly authoritarian over time.

The reason for the U.S. involvement in the war was the concern about the spread of communism in Southeast Asia, and the prevention of the domino effect of neighboring countries falling to communism. The policy of "Containment"² led to American involvement in supporting South Vietnam against the communist North. This is evident in the speech Senator John F. Kennedy made in 1956 before the American Friends of Vietnam named "America's Stake in Vietnam":

"Vietnam represents the cornerstone of the Free World in Southeast Asia, the keystone to the arch, the finger in the dike. Burma, Thailand, India, Japan, the Philippines and obviously Laos and Cambodia are among those whose security would be threatened if the red tide of Communism overflowed into Vietnam. [...] Vietnam represents a proving ground of democracy in Asia. However we may choose

² The policy of "Containment" was a strategy adopted by the United States during the Cold War to prevent the spread of communism, particularly the influence of the Soviet Union, to other countries around the world. The term "Containment" was coined by the American diplomat George F. Kennan in his famous "Long Telegram" from Moscow in 1946 and further elaborated in his article "The Sources of Soviet Conduct" published in the journal *Foreign Affairs* in 1947. Kennan's analysis of Soviet behavior and his proposal for a strategy of containment became influential in shaping U.S. foreign policy during the Cold War. The policy aimed to contain Soviet expansionism by supporting countries and governments perceived to be threatened by communist ideology or Soviet aggression.

to ignore it or deprecate it, the rising prestige and influence of Communist China in Asia are unchallengeable facts. Vietnam represents the alternative to Communist dictatorship. If this democratic experiment fails, if some one million refugees have fled the totalitarianism of the North only to find neither freedom nor security in the South, then weakness, not strength, will characterize the meaning of democracy in the minds of still more Asians. The United States is directly responsible for this experiment — it is playing an important role in the laboratory where it is being conducted. We cannot afford to permit that experiment to fail”.

(Kennedy, 1956)

As it is possible to notice from the speech, the belief in the “domino theory” posited that if one country in Southeast Asia fell to communism, neighboring countries would follow suit like falling dominoes. This theory, together with the alleged responsibility of America in the Vietnam conflict, contributed to fuel the U.S. involvement.

In the meantime, President Diem in South Vietnam implemented a series of authoritarian measures as the widespread suppression of newspapers critical of his regime. However, the actual reason behind the southern insurgency has been attributed to the extensive use of forceful suppression against the Viet Minh by the Diem regime in 1956–57.

The Viet Minh, champions of peasant interests and emboldened by their triumph over the French, not only enjoyed widespread popularity and effective control over significant southern territories, but also possessed a well-organized structure poised to capitalize on the democratic freedoms declared in the final resolution of the Geneva Conference. Since the Viet Minh enjoyed the growing support of the population they began to be seen as a threat in the eyes of President Diem.

The President’s hostility quickly spread to all political components that did not wholeheartedly support his regime. This led to large-scale arrests of citizens, without actually taking into account the affiliation to any rebellious or undermining actions. The oppressive policies of the Diem regime from 1956 to 1959 generated impetus for armed resistance in the South.

Exploiting the political turmoil in the South, some Communist infiltrators from the North entered South Vietnam. Additionally, to support fresh military endeavors in the South,

Hanoi decided to establish a network of trails for transporting troops and equipment across the seventeenth parallel. Towards the close of 1959, a few thousand soldiers had entered the South, carrying thirty-one tons of weapons and other provisions. This marked the initial flow of what would eventually turn into a significant infiltration down the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

Despite this, Diem's police network effectively identified and countered many Communists operating in South Vietnam. By that time, President Diem's government had experienced a substantial decline in support among the Southern Vietnamese. In response to Diem's repressive policies, in December 1960, the southern Communists formed the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam (NFL) and established an armed wing, later referred to as the "Vietcong" – that stands for Vietnamese Communists. This group sought assistance from North Vietnam, marking the official start of the Vietnam War.

After the unsuccessful American-backed invasion of Cuba in April 1961, which aimed to overthrow Fidel Castro's communist regime, and the failure to take a decisive stance on the seizure of power by Laos' communist movement, the credibility of the U.S. seemed notably weakened. There was a pressing need to bolster American power and demonstrate resolve, not only to signal President Kennedy's strength to the Soviets and Chinese but also to address concerns from conservative critics at home.

Indeed, the Vietnam conflict transcended mere warfare; it represented a significant gamble for the credibility of the United States. With diminishing success in the struggle against communism, losing another battle would jeopardize America's credibility to safeguard its global allies and honor its commitments. Kennedy recognized the urge to assist South Vietnam in its defense against the Communism Nord, but rather than sending U.S. combat forces opted for artillery, armored vehicles and advisory.

At first, the assistance was successful, the South was able to back the NLF forces at the extent that Kennedy planned for a withdraw of the advisors he sent over to Vietnam, however his strategy backfired.

Indeed, as the conflict between North and South Vietnam intensified, the living conditions of the South Vietnamese worsened during the war. The North Vietnamese exploited this wave of discontent, recruiting people and support. The American confidence shattered

when the NLF conquered a major victory in the area of the Mekong Delta in January 1963. As the tension between the two fronts increased, Diem's government faced rising challenges inside its borders, eventually escalating in revolts. The South Vietnamese president was slowly losing the support of America, resulting in an American-backed coup d'état that overthrew Diem's government.

Following the assassination of Kennedy in November 1963, Lyndon Johnson took over the presidency, who was loyal to his predecessor's stance. However, in August 1964 the tables turned after the Gulf of Tonkin incident: a U.S. destroyer was attacked by North Vietnamese forces. The incident led to the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, authorizing the President to undertake "all necessary measures" enabling airstrikes on North Vietnam and deploying U.S. troops as retaliation. North Vietnam resorted to China and Soviet Union for an increase in military aid.

On October 27, 1964, the Cambodian government issued a threat to sever diplomatic ties with the United States, citing instances of U.S. troops and aircraft violating Cambodian sovereignty along the border with South Vietnam.

One month after the election, Johnson gave the green light to a two-stage aerial bombing plan. The initial phase involved targeted strikes on the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos. In the second phase, there was a prolonged bombing campaign against North Vietnam spanning from two to six months.

Although the president promptly authorized bombing missions in Laos, he refrained from attacking North Vietnam due to concerns that South Vietnam might still be too vulnerable to withstand a broader conflict. At this point the conflict began to cross the borders of Vietnam, first into Laos and later on in Cambodia.

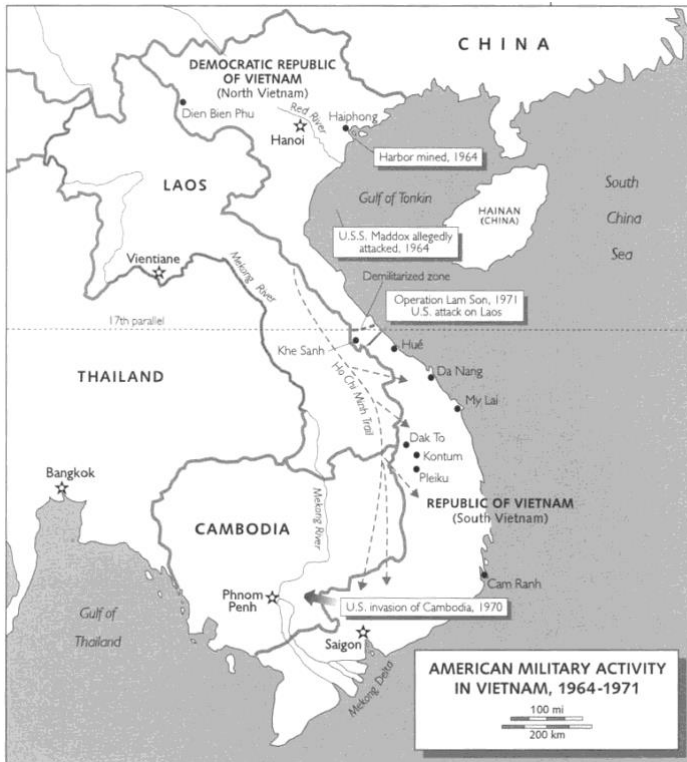


Figure 1.1 - The Vietnam War: a history in documents

Since the start of the war Cambodia and Laos declared themselves as neutral. However, what Cambodia feared the most was an invasion after the unification of Vietnam.

In this perspective, Prince Sihanouk entered into a confidential agreement with the Vietnamese Communists, permitting them to utilize the Ho Chi Minh Trail under the condition that they did so discreetly. In exchange, Sihanouk expected that in the event of Communist victory,

which he deemed inevitable, the new Communist government of a unified Vietnam would respect Cambodian sovereignty and borders.

What happened next was the implementation of the Operation Rolling Thunder in early March 1965, a campaign of continuous bombings against not only the North of Vietnam but it was extended to Laos and Cambodia in order to undermine the Ho Chi Minh trail. Simultaneously, American troops and special forces landed in Vietnam.

The drop that broke the pot occurred on May 1, when U.S. forces from South Vietnam bombed the “parrot’s beak” (the eastern area of Cambodia protruding into South Vietnam). Cambodia subsequently severed diplomatic relations with the United States, shuttered their embassy, and instructed their staff to leave the country.

Unfortunately, this was only the beginning. Starting in 1965, the U.S. initiated an extensive campaign of carpet bombing across Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. The declassification of documents related to the bombings in Southeast Asia occurred during U.S. President Bill Clinton’s visit to Vietnam in 2000.

While intended as a humanitarian gesture to assist the Vietnamese government in addressing unexploded mines and bombs, it unveiled a more ominous reality. It revealed that the bombing of Cambodia actually started under the presidency of Johnson. Indeed, spanning from October 4, 1965, to August 15, 1973, the United States released roughly 2,756,941 tons of bombs, carried out in 230,516 sorties targeting 113,716 sites (Owen & Kiernan, 2006).

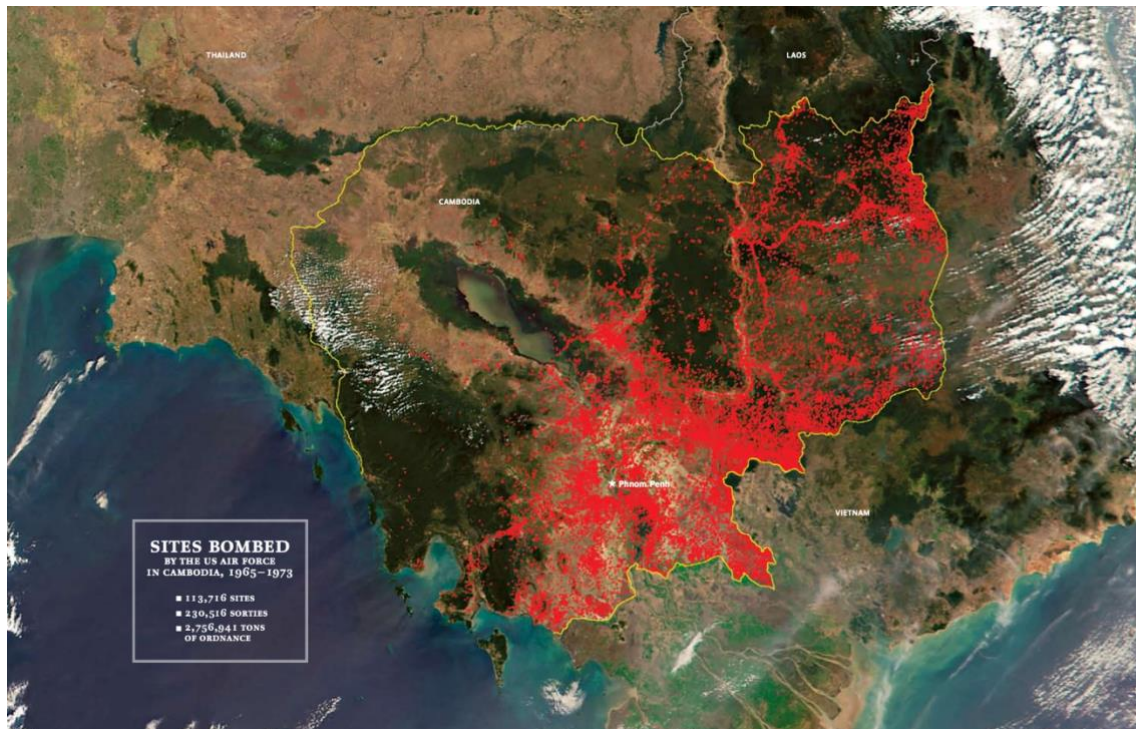


Figure 1.2 - Bombs Over Cambodia

In the image above it is possible to see the extension of American bombings in Cambodia marked in red in the period from 1965 to 1973. The initial strikes were probably tactical in nature, intended to aid the nearly two thousand covert ground incursions carried out by the CIA and U.S. Special Forces during that timeframe.

Despite escalating both the bombings and ground operations, the war did not shift in favor of the U.S. The impact of intervention by major military forces from the rear and the use of tactical air and gunships is often more counterproductive than decisive, and, in most cases, it remains strictly marginal.

The reason why the significant presence of heavy machinery and high explosives carries relatively little weight in the overall balance of operations is that, most of the time, the

infantry fire front is too closely connected. This prevents direct air strikes against the enemy line and restricts artillery to attempting to interdict escape routes. (Fishe, 1968).

By 1965, the U.S. had become deeply entrenched in the war, making withdrawal an unviable option. American policymakers for the Vietnam War found the prospect of humiliation to be unacceptable and not a viable course of action, therefore the decision to further intensify the military force. The Cambodian government permitted the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam, the “Vietcong”, to establish an office in Phnom Penh.

Regarding the period from 1965 to 1967, one could argue that the North Vietnamese essentially mirrored the extensive American buildup until, by March 1968, North Vietnamese forces were estimated to make up 71 percent of the total communist combat strength in the South (Lewy, 1980).

The United States continued to be apprehensive about direct involvement from China and the Soviet Union in the war, particularly with the escalation of their military activities. However, the two communist powers were confined to providing financial support, military training and supplying weapons. Furthermore, they were already preoccupied with domestic affairs, as Mao Zedong in China initiated, in May 1966, what would later be recognized as the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution.

1.2. OPERATION MENU

The transition in presidency from Johnson to Nixon in 1969 signaled a heightened intensity of bombings, featuring numerous covert operations. Notably, the commencement of Operation Menu marked the initiation of the most extensive bombing campaign in Laos and Cambodia.

The revised justification for these bombings was to hold enemy forces at bay, creating a window for the United States to facilitate its withdrawal from Vietnam. Despite Prince Norodom Sihanouk’s efforts to keep his country out of the Vietnam War, Cambodians essentially became expendable, serving as a shield to protect American lives (Owen & Kiernan, 2006).

Commander Abrams of the United States Forces in South Vietnam started to sense that one of the secret operative headquarters of the Vietcong was outside the borders of Vietnam, either in Laos or Cambodia. Later on, he was convinced that the headquarters was much farther south, located in one of the neutral border states of Cambodia, which the Communists were utilizing as bases and sanctuaries to evade the fighting in Vietnam.

The intention of the commander was to attack it. He was aware of the intention of the U.S. to withdraw from Vietnam, but, during a conversation with the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, he remarked: “the successful destruction of COSVN HQ³s in a single blow would, I believe, have a very significant impact on enemy operations throughout South Vietnam”. He added: “There is little likelihood of involving Cambodian nationals if the target boxes are placed carefully. Total bomber exposure over Cambodian territory would be less than one minute per sortie.” (Shawcross, 1979). The conversation concluded with the commander asking for authority to proceed with the attack.

During a meeting at the Pentagon, to further illustrate the details of the proposal, Abrams declared that they managed to locate the Vietcong and North Vietnamese headquarters. The Base Area 353 was situated in the region known as the Fish Hook, a portion of Cambodia that extended into South Vietnam, to the northwest of Saigon. The area was regarded as one of the most crucial Communist sanctuaries in Cambodia (Shawcross, 1979). In lights of the facts revealed by Abrams, the operation proposal was given the highest level of secrecy and the codename “Breakfast”.

³ COSVN HQ was the acronym for the elusive headquarters Central Office for South Vietnam.



Figure 1.3 - Sideshow: Kissinger, Nixon and the destruction of Cambodia

On March 18, 1969, the “operation Breakfast” was executed. Forty-eight targets in neutral Cambodia were struck by the direct order of President Nixon. The reports about the strike were as follows: “We had been told, as had everybody [...] that those carpet-bombing attacks by B-52s [were] totally devastating, that nothing could survive, and if they had a troop concentration there it would be annihilated” (Shawcross, 1979, p. 25).

Subsequent to the strike, a reconnaissance was dispatched to the area to pick up any Communist survivors, assuming it would be an easy task, but it only met the rage of Communists that opened the fire on the helicopter.

The reconnaissance mission was unsuccessful. Given the fact that the operation breakfast did not meet the expectation nor the result that Nixon and Kissinger hoped, they decided to repeat the operation. Moreover, according to Abrams’ headquarters, Base Area 353 was part of 15 other Communist sanctuaries. Once the U.S. decided that the Communist repression and elimination justified the violation of Cambodia’s neutrality, Nixon and Kissinger implemented a vast scale carpet bombing plan.

Over the next fourteen months, a total of 3,630 B-52 raids targeted suspected Communist bases along various areas of Cambodia’s border.

The operation, collectively known as “Menu”, progressed through stages named after meals, such as “Breakfast”, “Lunch”, “Snack”, “Dinner”, “Dessert”, and “Supper”, as it expanded to cover one “sanctuary” after another.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff advised the President that the sanctuaries were also inhabited by civilians, and their lives would be at risk if extensive bombings were carried out. However, the administration did not heed this concern.

In a memorandum of April 9, 1969, written for the Secretary of Defense, the Chiefs of Staff identified fifteen North Vietnamese bases in Cambodia and believed that all these “sanctuaries” should be targeted. They tried to assess the potential number of Cambodian casualties, arguing that as the Cambodians lived separately from the Vietnamese troops, their casualties would be “minimal”. However, they acknowledged that such calculations were dependent on numerous variables and were “tenuous at best”. In conclusion some Cambodians casualties were unavoidable. The Chiefs provided a comprehensive description of the fifteen North Vietnamese bases in Cambodia as follows:

“Base Area 353, Breakfast, covered 25 square kilometers and had a total population of approximately 1,640 Cambodians, of whom the Joint Chiefs reckoned 1,000 to be peasants. There were, according to the Chiefs, thirteen Cambodian towns in the area. (Villages would be a more accurate description.)

Base Area 609, Lunch, was north, near the Laotian border, in wild country without any towns. The Chiefs asserted that there were an estimated 198 Cambodians there, all of them peasants.

Base Area 351, Snack, covered 101 square kilometers and had an estimated 383 Cambodians, of whom 303 were considered peasants. There was one town in the area.

Base Area 352, Dinner, had an estimated Cambodian population of 770, of whom 700 were peasants. It contained one town.

Base Area 350, Dessert, had an estimated Cambodian population of 120, all peasants.”

(Shawcross, 1979)

The Chiefs recommended excluding base areas 704, 354, and 707 from the operation, but eventually their recommendation was not seconded as base area 707 figured on the White House's Menu as Supper. The U.S. Congress was left in the dark about the operation. The plan was carefully crafted so that the operations and expenditures of fuel and munitions were justified and the data was included in the regular operations.

The bombings did not unfold as intended. In the autumn of 1969, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recognized that Operation Menu had failed to achieve its military objective as it did not eliminate the Communist sanctuaries nor the South Vietnamese Communist headquarters in Cambodia. Instead, they had the unintended consequence of exacerbating the conflict.

In reaction to the U.S. raids, the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong relocated their sanctuaries and supply bases away from the borders and deeper into Cambodia. The Nixon administration's response was to broaden the area targeted by the B-52s, a trend that eventually increased over the years.

With the conflict encroaching into its own territory, Cambodia was grappling with a severe economic crisis. The U.S. bombings were exacerbating the situation, contributing to political instability as Prince Sihanouk was steadily losing support due to his inability to prevent the conflict from reaching the country.

Both Prime Minister Lon Nol and Prince Sihanouk expressed their grievances about the Vietnamese Communists presence in the country. Sihanouk even went to Moscow and Beijing, seeking intervention from the two major supporters of the Vietnamese, urging them to apply pressure for the withdrawal or, at the very least, a reduction in the presence of their soldiers in Cambodia.

March 11, 1970, was characterized by a series of protests in Phnom Penh against the presence of Vietnamese Communists in Cambodia and eventually escalated in a riot. The riots targeted the Embassy of the Provisional Revolutionary Government (the political arm of the Vietcong), the North Vietnamese Embassy and the Office of the North Vietnamese commercial attaché, some even headed over the Chinese Embassy.

This enraged Prince Sihanouk, that at that moment was in Paris for medical treatments. His reaction was to condemn the happenings in public, but he later raged to Lon Nol and

Prince Sirik Matak in private. However the private meeting was secretly recorded and then used against the Prince in order to depose him. In the recording Prince Sihanouk threatened to execute part of the government when he returned, this constituted enough material for his destitution, leaving also the government in disbelief. On March 18, Prince Sihanouk was unanimously overthrown as Chief of State by the National Assembly.

Since Prince Sirik Matak and Lon Nol were openly pro-American there are some debates that argue the possibility of a foreign involvement in the destitution of Prince Sihanouk. However, there is no evidence of direct involvement of the U.S. on the contrary, a South Vietnamese involvement is more plausible, as the South Vietnamese vice-president secretly visited Phnom Penh a couple of times prior March 18.

The President of South Vietnam was pleased with the change of government, as he shared common interests with Lon Nol. He expressed a desire to collaborate with Cambodia to expel the communists from the country. The intention was immediately put into practice, as South Vietnamese troops and the air force initiated attacks on the border areas. Following their own contingency plans, the Communists swiftly dispersed even farther west than the Menu strikes had previously pushed them (Shawcross, 1979).

The news of Sihanouk's dismissal reached him during his visit to Moscow, where he aimed to seek support from the main communist powers to exert pressure on the Vietnamese Communists for a withdrawal from Cambodia.

The reactions from the communist powers were mixed. The Soviet Union responded coolly to Sihanouk, and given his diminished status, he lacked sufficient influence to make demands. Conversely, during his subsequent visit to China, Sihanouk was received as a head of state. However, behind his back, the Chinese were engaged in negotiations with Lon Nol to refrain from attacking the sanctuaries in Cambodia.

While in China, Sihanouk declined to align himself with either the Communists or the Americans, as he articulated in his speech: "I had chosen not to be with either the Americans or the Communists, because I considered that there were two dangers, American imperialism and Asian Communism. It was Lon Nol who obliged me to choose between them". Instead, he constituted the National United Front of Kampuchea (FUNK) that aimed to "liberate our motherland". He also invoked people to: "to engage in guerrilla

warfare in the jungles against our enemies”, arousing the interests of the Communists factions involved in the war.

1.3. THE CIVIL WAR

In Cambodia, the change in government was embraced in the capital but not in the countryside, where the residents aligned with the Prince’s speech. Riots erupted in several provinces, with the strongest opposition occurring in the market town of Kompong Cham, the second most important city in Cambodia. The protests quickly escalated into violence, culminating with the killing of Lon Nil, Lon Nol’s brother.

On March 24, Mike Rives at the U.S. Embassy in Phnom Penh expressed concern about the potential for clashes between Cambodia and North Vietnamese/Viet Cong (NVN/VC) troops, emphasizing the risk of escalation and the possibility of the Khmer people rising against resident Vietnamese and Chinese.

Marshall Green, the Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and Pacific Affairs, endorsed these views, suggesting diplomatic solutions through an international conference proposed by the French.

However, the White House declined public support for the conference, and Green highlighted the paradox that U.S. support could both aid Cambodia’s rebuilding and restrict its neutrality. He also warned that aiding Lon Nol might be perceived as widening the war, potentially leading to further restrictions on aid to Vietnam, which ultimately unfolded as predicted (Shawcross, 1979).

At the end of March, South Vietnamese forces crossed into Cambodia, prompting the North Vietnamese to advance deeper into the country. Recognizing his inability to halt the westward march, Lon Nol issued a call to arms, seeking assistance from foreign countries. Lon Nol successfully garnered the support of the U.S., leading to the deployment of Khmer units (Khmer Krom and Khmer Serei) that had been trained in Vietnam for years. These units were finally launched on a large scale into Cambodia.

The Lon Nol government implemented a zero-tolerance policy towards the Viet Cong and any Vietnamese residing in Cambodia, creating tension between the Cambodian population and these groups. Lon Nol’s call to arms quickly escalated in waves of

violence. The North Vietnamese and Viet Cong were not the only target, also innocent Vietnamese civilians were caught in the hatred. It turned into a war in which the Cambodians were striving to eliminate the Vietnamese presence from their country. As a consequence, the recently established Cambodian government faced international denunciation for its implementation of atrocities and racist policies.

During the months of April and May, there were extensive exchanges of proposals and counterproposals for escalation between the Joint Chiefs in Washington and General Abrams in Saigon. Abrams initially sought permission to deploy Special Forces teams deeper into Cambodia, proposing engagement of lucrative targets through tactical air, artillery, or exploitation forces. Later, amidst public claims of North Vietnamese movement threatening Phnom Penh, Abrams requested a month of tactical air strikes into Cambodia, assuring complete secrecy.

General Wheeler indicated higher-level approval would be needed, but suggested considering Menu (B-52) Operations for the described area. Although Abrams initially rejected this option, he was eventually permitted to send fighter bombers up to eighteen miles into the country. As the end of May, the new operation called "Patio" was implemented. The operation was a total of 156 tactical airstrikes and, similarly to Menu, they were kept concealed through misleading reports until 1973.

On May 1, a substantial military force comprising U.S. and South Vietnamese troops invaded Cambodia. Lon Nol was blindsided and he publicly declared that the operation violated the territorial integrity of Cambodia. Furthermore, he emphasized that not only did the U.S. fail to consult his government before the invasion, but they also did not block the potential escape route of the Communists before initiating the attack. Instead, they proceeded with the invasion, pushing further into Cambodia.

The Cambodian government was not able to protect the country nor its citizens. The invasion destroyed everything it encountered, with no distinction between nationality, age or political beliefs.

As a military operation, it successfully attained its goals, expelling the Vietnamese Communists from the region bordering South Vietnam. On the other hand, the invasion proved disastrous for Cambodia as the unwanted result was to drive the communist deeper

into the country. moreover, the way it was carried out violated principles of policymaking, overlooked crucial intelligence, and disregarded political realities. Congress, entrusted with the constitutional authority to declare war, was completely sidelined (Shawcross, 1979).

Nixon's aim was to reduce the American military force in Cambodia, as his plan was to withdraw his men by the end of June. The only help he would eventually offer Cambodia was the introduction of a program of restricted economy and military aid that, of course, did not compensate for the damages he inflicted to the country.

The day after the invasion of Cambodia, the U.S. Congress finally realized that the President was overstepping Congress' authority in matters of war by failing to consult with them prior to the invasion and asserted that he was: "conducting a constitutionally unauthorized war in Indochina". On May 11, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee approved an amendment that restricted all future operations in Cambodia.

It was the first time that the Congress restricted the President with the use of the law. After June 30, it was prohibited to introduce any American troops, air operations or advisers in Cambodia. However, in doing so, Congress neglected to provide assistance to the Cambodians when they needed it most, further aggravated by the fact that the U.S. was responsible for the exact situation Cambodia found itself in.

Even though the amendment declared the bombing of Cambodia was illegal after June 30th (with the only exception for intercepting Communist personnel and supplies en route to Vietnam), the country became a free-fire zone at the end of the summer. This was possible due to deliberately inaccurate post operational reports, there was limited scrutiny to assess the actual targets being attacked.

Paradoxically, pilots in Cambodia had more freedom to choose any targets, facing fewer to almost no restrictions compared to their counterparts in Vietnam. Cambodia was still a neutral country as they had not declared war but only asked for assistance in getting rid of the Communists invading their territory (Shawcross, 1979).

The invasion of Cambodia was not controlled nor disciplined as Cambodian civilians were targeted by South Vietnamese forces. The citizens were either killed or abused, there

was no distinction between enemies and innocents. Lon Nol was concerned about the fate of his people and his country. He even started to fear that South Vietnam and Thailand could take advantage of the defenselessness of his country and annex some Cambodian territories.

On October 9, 1970, Cambodia officially became the Khmer Republic.

Meanwhile, the sanctuaries were expanding, and the extensive American bombings and the invasion were radicalizing the rural population of Cambodia. In regard to the invasion, in his book Richard Dudman wrote:

“It appears evident from this vantage point that the results will be the exact opposite of what was intended. [...] The bombing and the shooting was radicalizing the people of rural Cambodia and was turning the countryside into a massive, dedicated and effective rural base. [...] American shells and bombs are proving to the Cambodians beyond doubt that the United States is waging unprovoked colonialist war against the Cambodian people”.

(Dudman, 1971, p. 69)

At this point the war was exacting a significant toll on Cambodia's as its economy was almost nonexistent. The production of rubber had come to a halt and rice production was also slowing down. Cambodia was facing both an economic and administrative crisis. Moreover, the invasion and especially the extensive carpet bombing, led to civilian casualties and forced many to seek refuge in urban areas. However, the number of refugees displaced during the war is still not clear.

In 1972 the war was deepening corruption in the country, exacerbating the overall situation in Cambodia. There was discontent in Lon Nol's management of the war, so he appointed Son Ngoc Thanh as Prime Minister and declared Himself as President of the Khmer Republic.

In the meantime Prince Sihanouk was exiled in China and allied with the Cambodian Communists that formed the Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK) – which he called

Khmer Rouge. Among them there were Khieu Samphan⁴, Hu Nim, and Hou Youn, but the people who were overseeing the Communist Party were Saloth Sar⁵ (later known as Pol Pot), Ieng Sary⁶ and Son Sen⁷. They were hiding in the Cambodian jungle, recruiting supporters among the rural population of the country, using the discontent generated by the American bombings and the atrocities that happened during the invasion to get them to join the Communist cause.

They were using Sihanouk movements to exploit both his international and national prestige among the population in order to eventually assume power. However, in secret, they were removing Sihanouk supporters and replacing them with Communist people, altering the character of the movement.

When he won the presidential elections in June 1972, Lon Nol expanded the Socio-Republican Party, associating numerous politicians with it. He increased his team of presidential advisers, offering substantial government salaries to senior political figures in exchange for their advice, contributing to the corruption of the entire political class

⁴ Khieu Samphan, also known as comrade Hem, was born in 1931 in Kampong Cham. Prince Sihanouk appointed him Secretary of State for Commerce, but he resigned from his post in 1964, though he remained in the National Assembly for four more years.

In 1967, amid accusations of being a communist agent, Khieu Samphan went into hiding in the jungle. After Prince Sihanouk's resignation in 1976, he was appointed President of the State Presidium of Democratic Kampuchea. He went into exile with Pol Pot from 1979 to 1998, until he defected to the Royal Government of Cambodia. He was arrested in November 2007 (Documentation Center of Cambodia, 2020).

⁵ Saloth Sar, born in 1925 in Kampong Thom province, hailed from a family of prosperous landowners. In 1953, he taught history and geography at a private high school while clandestinely engaging in communist activities. He wed Khieu Ponnary in 1956.

By 1960, Pol Pot had risen to the rank of third in the then-Workers' Party of Kampuchea. He ascended to the position of second deputy secretary in 1961 and subsequently became party secretary in 1963. Later, he led the Khmer Rouge army in its struggle against the Lon Nol regime.

Pol Pot assumed the role of prime minister of Democratic Kampuchea in 1976 and resigned in 1979, though he remained an influential figure within the Khmer Rouge movement (Documentation Center of Cambodia, 2020).

⁶ Ieng Sary, also known as comrade Vann, was born in 1930 in Vinh Binh, South Vietnam. In 1957, he joined the People's Revolutionary Party of Kampuchea. Ieng Sary worked as a teacher at Kampuchaboth High School until 1963, when he fled to the jungle and later became the military commander of the Northeast Zone.

In 1976, Ieng Sary was appointed as the first deputy prime minister in charge of foreign affairs. He also held positions as a member of the Central Committee and the Standing Committee. He defected to the Royal Government of Cambodia in 1996 (Documentation Center of Cambodia, 2020).

⁷ Son Sen, also known as comrade Khiev, was born on June 12, 1930, in Travinh, southern Vietnam. By 1971, he had risen to the position of chief of staff of the Cambodian People's National Liberation Armed Forces.

During the Democratic Kampuchea era, Son Sen held the role of third deputy prime minister, overseeing national defense, and was directly involved with S-21. Tragically, Son Sen and his family were executed in the Anlong Veng district on June 10, 1997, upon orders from Pol Pot (Documentation Center of Cambodia, 2020).

(Corfield, 2009). At this point the economy of Cambodia was sustained solely by U.S. financial support. Indeed, from the start of 1971 until April 1975, the United States aid played a predominant role in nearly every aspect of political, economic, and military affairs in Cambodia (Shawcross, 1979).

In 1973, the revelations of bombings in Laos and Cambodia surfaced. However, Kissinger and Nixon asserted that the operations were carried out in uninhabited parts of the country, a claim that was known to be untrue even at that time. Kissinger went so far as to state: “It was not a bombing of Cambodia, but it was a bombing of North Vietnamese in Cambodia”. Additionally, he alleged that Sihanouk was either ignoring or tacitly approving the bombings, justifying the secrecy of the project to protect him. However, it is more plausible that the king recognized his lack of power to intervene (Shawcross, 1979).

In 1973, following the Paris Peace Agreement that prohibited American bombing in Vietnam and later Laos, the entire Air Force was redirected to Cambodia.

According to Shawcross, the Khmer Rouge movement during the war can be divided into three phases. In the first phase, until mid-1971, they were allied with Sihanouk and, under North Vietnamese supervision, took control of abandoned areas in the countryside without undertaking any political programs.

The second phase, from summer 1971 to early 1973, saw the Khmer Rouge breaking away from Hanoi, discarding both Sihanouk and his followers, and initiating collectivist measures. In the third stage, starting from the Paris Peace Agreement in January 1973, the Khmer Rouge operated with increasing independence. They relied on North Vietnamese logistics but had no assured assistance from any foreign power. This was the period in which they implemented their military measures, that eventually radically changed Cambodia and its population, leading to the Khmer Rouge victory in 1975 (Shawcross, 1979).

The U.S. bombings provided the Khmer Rouge with the pretext to gain even more supporters. The CPK exploited political, economic, and wartime hardships to garner support for their cause. On May 2, 1973, even the CIA’s Directorate of Operations in a report remarked that the Khmer Rouge were: “using damage caused by B-52 strikes as

the main theme of their propaganda” (Central Intelligence Agency, 1973). However, the report was quickly discarded by Nixon’s administration.

In July and August 1973, the Southwest Zone of Cambodia was subjected to carpet bombing. It marked the most intense B-52 campaign up to that point. In August 1973, the Congress ruled to put an end to the bombing. Nevertheless, hundred thousand of bombs of American, South Vietnamese, and Cambodian air forces were released in Cambodia without being controlled nor reported. The territories hit were the ones controlled initially by the North Vietnamese, and the Khmer Rouge later.

The two images below represent the intensity of the bombings in 1973. The maps indicate that a significant number of bombs were dropping on densely populated regions of Cambodia.

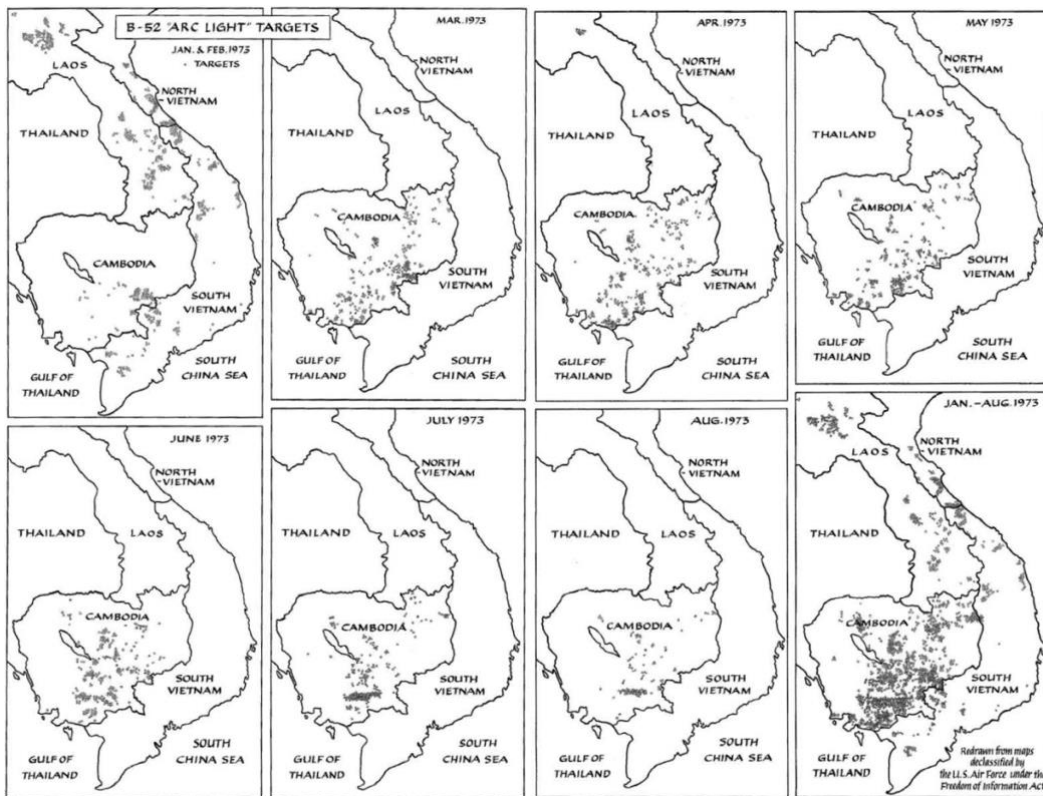


Figure 1.4 - Sideshow: Kissinger, Nixon and the destruction of Cambodia

The war caused frictions between the government and the citizens at the extent that Lon Nol announced a state of siege, suspended all newspapers except those supportive of the government and arrested all the royals that were still in the capital.

At the same time, in 1973, President Nixon was investigated for the Watergate scandal that revealed secret White House tapes, which recorded conversations between Nixon and his aides. As investigations unfolded, it was revealed that President Richard Nixon and his aides had engaged in various illegal activities, including attempts to cover up the involvement of the administration in the break-in of the Watergate office complex in Washington, D.C., on June 17, 1972. Facing imminent impeachment, Richard Nixon had to resign from office on August 8, 1974. The presidency was assumed by Gerald Ford, Nixon's vice president.

From the second half of 1973 to 1975, the bombings in Cambodia targeted the Khmer Rouge, as they were gaining more land, power and support. Meanwhile, Sihanouk realized that the Khmer Rouge had co-opted his movement, leveraging his name for support.

On January 1, 1975, the Cambodian Communists' dry season offensive begun. At that time Cambodia and Lon Nol's government were on the verge of collapse. Recognizing the dire circumstances, foreign representatives and ambassadors opted to evacuate the country. Lon Nol, on the other hand, remained in Cambodia until April 1st, when he ultimately accepted President Suharto's invitation to relocate to Indonesia.

At this point both Saigon and Phnom Penh were about to fall. The Communists were advancing toward Saigon, the South Vietnamese government was collapsing. In Cambodia instead, the Khmer Rouge were approaching the center of the capital. On April 10, the United States prepared to evacuate its Embassy and staff in Phnom Penh. U.S. Marines were deployed to the capital to ensure the security of their Embassy and an adjacent field. They managed to evacuate 276 people.

The Khmer Rouge penetrated Republican lines surrounding Phnom Penh on April 17, 1975, and advanced toward the city center. The Republican Army Radio Station announced a surrender at 7 A.M., that would take effect in two hours. Phnom Penh had fallen. As they entered the city, the Khmer Rouge were celebrated by citizens, who believed the war was finally over.

However, their happiness did not last for long. Shortly after the defeat of the capital, the Khmer Rouge announced over the radio that they had no intention of negotiating with

anyone, would execute high-ranking officials and military commanders from the previous government and the citizens were urged to abandon the city and move towards the countryside.

Returning to the first research question: “How the international actors affected and determined the rise of the Khmer rouge in Cambodia?” here are some key observations.

It is undeniable that the international actors namely the United States, China, the Soviet Union, and both North and South Vietnam had a major impact in the rise of the Khmer Rouge.

However, what sets them apart during this historical period is that, while China, the Soviet Union, and both North and South Vietnam offered economic, logistic and military support to both Republican and Communist factions in Cambodia, the U.S. played a distinctive role.

As Kiernan mentions, the bombing of Cambodia had three major effects. The first one was that it reduced and even annihilated several CPK regular units. The second effect was that it resulted in massive loss of Khmer civilian lives and property. And the last one was that the extensive bombings resulted in a significant increase in recruits for the revolutionary ranks, with many motivated by a desire for revenge rather than positive political or social goals. This surge in recruits became advantageous for the Pol Pot party (Kiernan, 1996).

The shelling of Cambodia proved to be a crucial turning point, ultimately paving the way for the Khmer Rouge’s victory as they exploited the destruction and discontent left in its wake.

Most of the American intervention and bombing in Cambodia, can fall into the definition provided in Article 6 (b) of the Charter of the International Military Tribunal, constituted after World War II:

“violations of the laws or customs of war. Such violations shall include, but not be limited to, murder, ill treatment or deportation to slave labor for any other purpose of civilian population of or in occupied territory, murder or ill treatment of prisoners of war or persons on the seas, killing of hostages, plunder of public or private

property, wanton destruction of cities, towns or villages, or devastation not justified by military necessity”.

(United Nations, 1945)

This is the definition of War Crime. The United States pursued aggression against a neutral country solely to avoid the humiliation of losing the Vietnam War to the Communists, a conflict that, in the end, they still did not manage to win.

Unfortunately, to date, their actions in Cambodia and Laos go unpunished.

2. THE REGIME OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF KAMPUCHEA

Everything that happened in the days subsequent the fall of Phnom Penh were a prelude to the next four years. The Communists initiated the evacuation of the capital and other major cities in Cambodia. They asserted that the U.S. might bomb the cities, prompting people to relocate to the countryside for safety.

Nevertheless, there were discrepancies in the announcement and execution of the evacuation. Many people were unaware of the unfolding events, soldiers primarily cited the impending American bombing of Phnom Penh as the main reason for evacuation. Another reason given was the Khmer Rouge's need to clear the town of enemy forces.

The soldiers from the four different zones of the country, assigned to occupy the city, were issuing conflicting orders. Residents were given only ten minutes to leave their homes, often under the threat of weapons pointed at them.

In different areas of the city, some people were granted time to pack or look for relatives, while others were fatally shot for refusing to depart immediately. People were instructed to pack lightly, as they were told they would return in three days. Many believed this and left with minimal supplies of food, water, or medicine.

The process was not voluntary; instead, it was enforced. The exodus from Phnom Penh in April 1975 was chaotic, terrifying, and enforced (Documentation Center of Cambodia, 2020). Hospitals were cleared of patients, and thousands of evacuees, particularly the very young, old, and sick, perished on the journey.

Everyone was forced to leave the city. Pregnant women faced fatalities during childbirth due to the absence of medicine and medical services. Within a few miles of the city center, more and more bodies could be seen where their relatives had been forced to abandon them.

The foreigners that were still in Phnom Penh took refuge in the French Embassy, together with some Cambodians that were either related or worked with them. In less than two days, the vice-consul received notification from the Khmer Rouge stating that Cambodia belonged to its people, and the new government did not acknowledge concepts such as

territoriality or diplomatic privilege. They warned that if he did not expel all Cambodians, the lives of foreigners would also be at risk (Shawcross, 1979).

Ieng Sary argued that in absence of the U.S. airlift of supplies, which concluded with Operation Eagle Pull, the population faced the imminent threat of starvation. For instance, people were quickly relocated to the countryside because there was only a limited timeframe before the rice had to be planted in preparation for the wet season. However, Corfield argues that the actual motive might have been to facilitate Communist control over the population more effectively while purging the enemies of CPK (Corfield, 2009).

Amidst the widespread evacuation, sporadic clashes persisted between Lon Nol and Khmer Rouge forces, dividing the city and separating families. The streets were strewn with lifeless bodies and deserted possessions. Periodic checkpoints were established to identify former Lon Nol soldiers and officials, compelling many to conceal their identities out of fear of arrest.

The Khmer Rouge aimed to reshape Cambodia into a rural, classless society devoid of wealth disparities, poverty, and exploitation. Wealthy people, intellectuals and anyone that sought suspicion would be taken aside and killed. This included anyone wearing glasses or speaking other languages than Khmer. Those who were educated, questioned Angkar, complained, engaged in extramarital relationships, or had any association with Vietnam were targeted for execution. The wives and families of these “traitors” also faced the threat of execution, and the methods used for these killings were often brutal.

The Khmer Rouge compelled approximately two million residents of Phnom Penh, including over a million wartime refugees, to relocate to the countryside. Within a week, the urban population of Phnom Penh and other cities previously governed by the Khmer Republic government were transferred to rural areas to engage in agricultural labor (Documentation Center of Cambodia, 2020).

As they stepped into the first night of April 17, 1975, Cambodians were informed that henceforth only Angkar – “The Organization” – would rule, marking the beginning of a new era for Cambodia. This was the beginning of “Year Zero”. From April 1975, Cambodia was under a state of siege and completely isolated from the rest of the world.

The individuals compelled to relocate from the city to villages came to be known as the “New People”. The Khmer Rouge eliminated money, free markets, traditional education, private property, foreign attire, religious practices, and Khmer cultural norms.

Public institutions were repurposed or closed, and transportation, private property, and non-revolutionary entertainment were prohibited. Leisure activities were severely restricted, and everyone, including CPK leaders, was required to wear black revolutionary attire. Under Democratic Kampuchea, basic rights were stripped away, limiting movement and gatherings, with even small discussions risking arrest and execution (Documentation Center of Cambodia, 2020).

The CPK’s policy of compelled relocations aimed to dismantle the existing human relationships and institutions that had long governed Cambodian society before the revolution. These institutions encompassed not only the Lon Nol government but also the traditional family structure, religious entities, ethnic minority communities, and networks of intellectuals and business merchants.

By disrupting these relationships and institutions, the regime sought to hinder organized resistance against it. Additionally, the forced relocations aimed to make it easier to influence Cambodians, especially children, into pledging loyalty to Angkar by preventing loyalty to parents, ethnic kin, religious figures, or other traditional community leaders (Documentation Center of Cambodia, 2020). The ultimate objective was to eliminate urban living and establish a new Cambodia centered around increased rice production.

In 1976, Cambodians who had never experienced collectivization were compelled to contribute their personal belongings, including kitchen utensils, for collective use. During this process, families were divided, and individuals were assigned to work groups, resulting in the separation of husbands and wives, as well as children from their parents.

Already between 1970 and 1975, in areas liberated by the Khmer Rouge, individuals were grouped into cooperatives consisting in several hundred people or even entire villages. During the years the cooperatives increased in number of components, as they came to incorporate a thousand of families or even entire sub-districts.

The leaders of the CPK established cooperatives as part of their efforts to eliminate private ownership and capitalism, while also aiming to bolster the status of workers and peasants. Living in a cooperative entailed individuals residing together, working collectively, sharing meals, and participating in each other's leisure activities. This approach led to significant restrictions on family life.

Moreover, all members of a cooperative were required to contribute all their property, which constituted crucial means of production, for collective use (Documentation Center of Cambodia, 2020). The cooperatives were intended to achieve as much self-sufficiency as possible.

Children were recognized as the future of the revolution and were subjected to political instruction, attending mandatory indoctrination classes. Despite the CPK's goal of creating a classless society, they introduced two new classes: the "base people" and the "new people".

The base people were those already living in rural areas, belonging to the poor or lower-middle classes and considered full-rights citizens or candidates. They were eligible to become chiefs of cooperatives and other units (Documentation Center of Cambodia, 2020).

The "new people" also known as the April 17 people, comprised individuals evacuated from the cities. They were viewed as parasites, deemed unreliable, and were met with suspicion and hatred by Angkar. This group had no rights and faced harsh treatment, though the severity varied based on the region.

On January 5, 1976, Democratic Kampuchea was officially established.

2.1. ANGKAR

The core and leadership of the Communist Party of Kampuchea was “Angkar Padevat” – the revolutionary organization. It was composed by Pol Pot, Nuon Chea⁸, So Phim, Ieng Sary, Son Sen, Ta Mok and Vorn Vet. The structure of Angkar is illustrated in the image below.

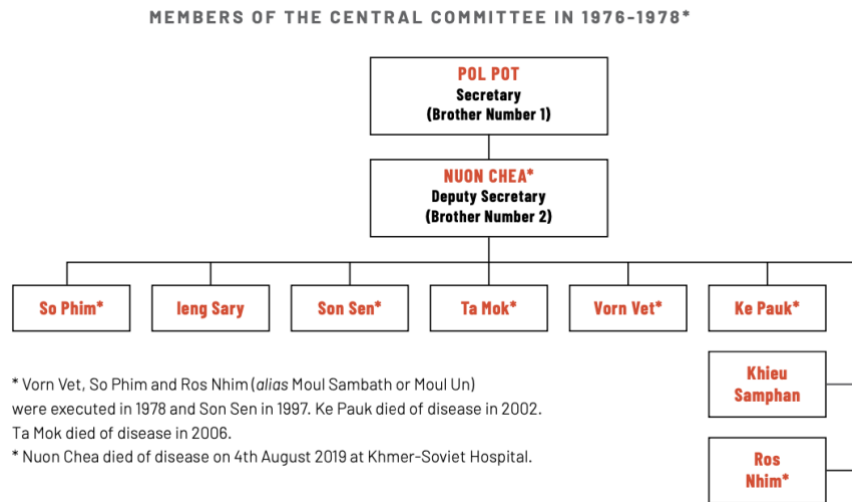


Figure 2.1 - Documentation Center of Cambodia

Prince Sihanouk was invited by the Khmer Rouge to go back to Cambodia. After his arrival in September 1975, he was forced to resign as head of state. In September 1976 the Khmer Rouge declared their commitment to the Marxism-Leninism ideology.

As previously mentioned, the CPK implemented a categorization system dividing the population based on geography, race, and politics. Initially, the “base people” included ethnic Khmer peasants, while the “new people” consisted of urban dwellers influenced by foreign and capitalist forces, positioning the urban working class in the perceived enemy faction. Adding to this geographical discrimination, the Khmer Rouge introduced

⁸ Nuon Chea, originally known as Runglert Laodi or Lao Kim Lorn, was born in 1926 in Battambang province. During the Democratic Kampuchea era, Nuon Chea held the position of president of the People’s Representative Assembly. Additionally, he served as the deputy secretary of the party’s Central and Standing Committees. Renowned for his involvement in security matters, as the second-highest-ranking party member, he played a pivotal role in implementing the stringent policies outlined by the Standing Committee.

Following the downfall of the Khmer Rouge regime in 1979, Nuon Chea sought refuge on the Thai-Cambodian border. After Pol Pot’s demise in 1998, he defected alongside Khieu Samphan to the Royal Government of Cambodia. However, in September 2007, he was apprehended (Documentation Center of Cambodia, 2020).

a further triple racial and ideological hierarchy, involving “deportees”, “candidates” and “full rights people” (Kiernan, 2006).

According to Kiernan, these social castes were further subdivided based on kinship, political affiliation, and geographic criteria, resulting in the proliferation of up to eleven sub-castes.

In 1976, Democratic Kampuchea was subdivided into six geographical zones, each encompassing two or more provinces or portions of old provinces. These zones were further divided into 32 regions, each assigned a number. Below the regions, the administrative hierarchy included districts, sub-districts, and cooperatives. The six zones were: the East Zone, the Southwest Zone, the North Zone, the Northwest Zone, the West Zone and the Northeast Zone. Each zone was administrated by a different secretary.



Democratic Kampuchea

Figure 2.2 - The Black Book of Communism

The Communist Party of Kampuchea crafted a four-year plan (1977-1980) which aimed to achieve an average national yield of three tons of rice per hectare. Given that Cambodians had never been required to generate large quantities of rice on a national level before, and considering the war’s impact on the country, which resulted in shortages of tools, farm animals, and a healthy workforce, achieving the objective was deemed impossible.

With this plan the intention was to attain complete economic and political independence for Cambodia, aiming to transform the country from an underdeveloped agricultural nation into a modernized agricultural society (Documentation Center of Cambodia, 2020).

Of course, the leadership of Democratic Kampuchea completely overlooked the hardships and ambitiousness of such plan.

The living conditions were extremely poor, people were malnourished, overworked and they did not have access to medical treatment. The ratios of food were insufficient for everyone, due to the fact that the majority of the harvest was allocated to sustain the military and factory workers, or it was exported to China and various other socialist nations. Unfortunately, the production rarely met the required levels and hardly any rice was set aside as seed or for the people, resulting in severe scarcity of food and malnutrition.

The Communist Party of Kampuchea quickly became a totalitarian regime. However it was a peculiar one. Indeed, Pol Pot aimed to a never exposed himself publicly as head of state or leader but he ruled through the organization of the Angkar. The organization's secretive nature was likely a result of Pol Pot's paranoia.

However, another rationale could be attributed to Khieu Samphan's perspective, suggesting that collective leadership could prevent the pitfalls associated with sole rule, such as the cult of personality and the brutality observed in other totalitarian regimes.

Additionally, during their studies in France, Pol Pot, Khieu Samphan, and Ieng Sary were influenced by the period of de-Stalinization, leaving a lasting impact on their perspectives. Despite these influences, it was insufficient to deter them from resorting to the use of violence.

The same paranoia ultimately triggered the purges. The upper ranks of the Angkar were apprehensive about potential assassination attempts or internal threats emerging not from external sources like the U.S., but from within the Communist Party of Kampuchea itself. Margolin claims that the purges were a: "mania for classification and elimination of different elements of society", moreover: "the CPK never seemed to have any regular

pattern of behavior and because the different geographic zones had varying degrees of autonomy, there was a constant air of mutual suspicion” (Margolin, 1999, p. 586).

At first, the purges mainly targeted intellectuals as teachers, academics, doctors, and other professionals, due to their perceived association with urban or bourgeois lifestyles and political dissidents, such as anyone perceived as opposing or questioning the policies of the Khmer Rouge regime. This included former government officials, members of rival political factions, and individuals suspected of harboring counter-revolutionary sentiments.

Then the hostility extended to ethnic minorities, religious figures, the “new people” and eventually the same members of the CPK. Ethnic minorities, especially Cham Muslims and Vietnamese communities, were subjected to discrimination, forced labor, and mass killings as part of the regime’s efforts to homogenize Cambodian society. Angkar viewed organized religion as a threat to its revolutionary goals. Temples and religious institutions were often destroyed, Buddhist monks and religious practitioners were subjected to forced labor, persecution, and execution.

However the purges inside the Communist party were characterized by a greater degree of complexity. Indeed, they were a multifaceted endeavor aimed at rooting out perceived threats to the leadership of Pol Pot and his inner circle. Individuals suspected of disloyalty, ideological deviation, or opposition to the regime’s revolutionary agenda were systematically targeted.

The purges had several key objectives. Firstly, they were a means of consolidating power for Pol Pot and his inner circle within the party hierarchy, maintaining control over decision-making processes and suppressing any challenges to their authority. Secondly, they were instrumental in enforcing strict ideological conformity among party members. The Khmer Rouge leadership was deeply committed to their vision of agrarian socialism, and individuals deemed ideologically impure or insufficiently devoted to the regime’s goals were purged to ensure uniformity of belief and action.

Furthermore, the purges were conducted to preempt potential coups or revolts against the leadership, neutralizing perceived threats whilst serving as a tool for maintaining stability, discipline and obedience within the party ranks. As previously mentioned, given the

regime's secretive and authoritarian nature, there was a constant fear of internal dissent or conspiracies. Surveillance, indoctrination, and harsh penalties were used to instill fear and ensure compliance with party directives, creating an atmosphere of paranoia and mistrust, an endless vicious circle.

According to Brown both Mao and Pol Pot were drawn to the notion of initiating the reconstruction of society with a "clean slate" (Brown, 2011). However, the latter went so far as to rewrite even the most recent history of the country, asserting that Cambodia's revolutionary struggle started with the establishment of the Kampuchean Communist Party in 1960. Differently from Europe, Communism in Asia was linked to anti-colonialism and national freedom.

In the policies implemented by Angkar there are similarities and influences from other contemporary and past totalitarianisms. The resemblance to Maoism is apparent, given the communal collectivization and the transformation of Cambodia into a modernized agricultural society, closely mirroring the Great Leap Forward initiated by Mao Zedong several years earlier.

2.2. IDEOLOGY AND AFFINITY WITH OTHER REGIMES

The Khmer Rouge embraced Marxist-Leninist ideology through a multifaceted approach that encompassed both theoretical principles and practical policies. However, the Khmer Rouge's interpretation and application of Marxist-Leninist doctrine were highly radical and extreme, resulting in a centralized and authoritarian state apparatus under the dictatorship of Pol Pot and the CPK leadership.

Central to their implementation of Marxist-Leninist principles was the establishment of a vanguard party, modeled after Lenin's concept of a revolutionary party leading the proletariat to revolution. The CPK adopted an anti-imperialist stance, opposing foreign domination and exploitation and seeking to assert Cambodia's national sovereignty and independence from external powers.

The Khmer Rouge adhered to the Marxist concept of class struggle, viewing the proletariat as the revolutionary force against the bourgeoisie. Indeed, it was this very

ideological stance that guided their efforts to eliminate class distinctions, establishing a classless society, and eventually physically eliminating wealthy people and intellectuals.

The implementation of the collectivization of agriculture, echoed Leninist ideals of abolishing private property and creating a communal ownership system, but it was also based on Mao Zedong's Great Leap Forward, although with some adjustments. This collectivist approach aimed to centralize control over resources and production, still aligning with Marxist-Leninist visions of socialist transformation.

The Great Leap Forward began in 1958 and aimed to rapidly transform China from an agrarian society into a socialist society through rapid industrialization and collectivization of agriculture. The key features of the Great Leap Forward included the formation of communes – large collective farms where people lived and worked together. The campaign encouraged the use of backyard furnaces for small-scale steel production, with the belief that China could quickly surpass industrialized nations in steel production.

However, the Great Leap Forward proved to be a disastrous policy. The exaggerated production targets, unrealistic goals, and the lack of proper planning led to widespread famine, economic decline, and a significant loss of life. Millions of people died due to famine and the disastrous consequences of the policies.

Despite the disastrous outcome and inefficiency of the Chinese campaign, Pol Pot was greatly influenced by it. In 1977, he decided to implement a similar approach in Cambodia, naming it “The Super Great Leap Forward” (Kiernan, 2006). However, the Cambodian plan differed significantly from the Chinese one, as it involved the violence, racism, social divisions and extensive purges that characterized the regime of Democratic Kampuchea.

From the Chinese Great Leap Forward, Pol Pot adopted the concept of collectivization, the ideological fervor and enthusiasm promoted by the Chinese Communist Party during the campaign, the so called “Communist wind”⁹ (Kiernan, 2006), moreover, Pol Pot targeted the family structures, eventually exceeding Mao's approach.

⁹ The “Communist wind” aimed to inspire and mobilize the masses to participate wholeheartedly in the transformative efforts envisioned by Mao Zedong and the Communist Party leadership. It encapsulated the collective spirit and dedication encouraged among the Chinese people to achieve the ambitious goals set forth by the Party, such as rapid industrialization and collectivization of agriculture.

According to Kiernan Pol Pot “selected” both failures and lessons of Communist China, acknowledging only some failures, shaping his Great Leap Forward as he pleased. Pol Pot decided to implement only some features and ideologies of the Chinese plan, regardless of the outcome or the mistakes the Communist Party already experienced. Indeed as Kiernan says in his article:

“It is easy to see a deliberate attempt, in DK’s “Super Great Leap Forward”, to imitate but also correct and surpass China’s Great Leap, partly by wildly reversing its disastrous massive industrialization and urbanization. Pol Pot took the Great Leap as a partial model but also as a challenge to meet”.

(Kiernan, 2006, p. 199)

The reason for this approach can be identified in a meeting that Pol Pot and Mao Zedong had on June 21st, 1975, in China in which Pol Pot admits: “I studied many of Chairman Mao’s works from a young age, particularly your work on the people’s war. Chairman Mao’s works guided our entire party while we were engaged in the political and military struggles. We made use of it in our actual struggle and achieved results”. During the conversation Mao advises Pol Pot to not completely follow China’s example. This could be the reason why Pol Pot decided to implement only some strategies of the Great Leap, adapting it to his vision and the Cambodian context.

Some authoritarian regimes, notably the Chinese and Cambodian regimes, share a characteristic known as “the revolutionary mass-movement regime under single-party auspices”, a concept formulated by Robert Tucker (Tucker, 1971). The theory refers to a type of authoritarian regime characterized by the monopolization of political power by a single ruling party that claims to represent the revolutionary aspirations of the masses.

Tucker focuses on the underlying ideological and psychological factors that shaped Soviet politics during the Stalinist era and its aftermath. However his theory can be applied to similar authoritarian regimes characterized by a single-party rule, and in this case, contributes to a deeper comprehension of the Khmer Rouge phenomenon and the actions they undertook. There are three main aspects of this concept that are relevant in this context, the first one is the question of the monopoly of power, exerted through single-party rule.

As previously mentioned, the Khmer Rouge, under the leadership of Pol Pot and the Communist Party of Kampuchea, exercised absolute control over all aspects of Cambodian society and governance, claiming to represent the unified will of the people.

The CPK monopolized political power, suppressing all rival political parties and dissenting voices, thereby ensuring its dominance over the state apparatus. Moreover, the Khmer Rouge espoused a radical revolutionary ideology rooted in Marxist-Leninist principles, which they claimed to represent the interests of the proletariat and peasantry. They portrayed themselves as the vanguard of the revolution, dedicated to liberating Cambodia from perceived bourgeois and imperialist influences.

Lastly, the regime sought to mobilize the masses through revolutionary fervor and ideological indoctrination. They implemented mass campaigns aimed at transforming Cambodian society according to their vision of agrarian socialism, including forced collectivization of agriculture, mass relocations of urban populations to rural areas, and ideological reeducation programs.

In the perspective of the comparison between the authoritarian regimes based on the concept of “the revolutionary mass-movement regime under single-party auspices”, it is possible to see some similarities of the identity construction in genocidal contexts. The Nazi and Stalinist regimes were distinctive phenomena of the twentieth century.

However, during the same period and afterward, there were attempts to replicate certain fundamental characteristics of these regimes or even both. The Democratic Kampuchea regime serves as an example of an attempt to replicate both the Nazi and Stalinist regimes. Whether this attempt was intentional or not is difficult to determine.

In this dissertation I already stressed the violence implemented during the Khmer Rouge regime. The practices used to implement such violence bear similarities to the Nazi construction of collective identity during the genocide. Hiebert identified three “switches” that are common both to the Cambodian and the Nazi genocide: dehumanization, totalization and symbiosis (Hiebert, 2008).

While the events and motivations of the Nazi genocide are clear to many of us, the Cambodian genocide has often passed quietly in the historical scene.

Hiebert claims that in both cases the genocide was an answer to a crisis and, from the perpetrators point of view, “a rational choice not because of the ideas or perceptions upon which it is based but because of the decision-making process that leads to its perpetration” (Hiebert, 2008, p. 7).

Hiebert’s three switches are:

“(1) the identification of the victim group as outside or foreign to the political community; (2) the identification of the victim group as an almost superhumanly powerful, dangerous “enemy within” whose continued existence threatens the very survival of the political community; and (3) the paradoxical identification of the victim group as subhuman.”

(Hiebert, 2008, p. 12)

Analyzing the Khmer Rouge genocide in this framework it is possible to recognize different groups that were recognized as “foreign” to the CPK regime. The victim groups were then targeted for eradication, both direct as the case of intellectuals, ethnic minorities, and those associated with the previous regime, and indirect as the case of the “new people”. Indirect eradication refers to the people that died for malnutrition, exhaustion, lack of medical care, abuses and tortures.

As discussed in earlier sections of this chapter, Pol Pot harbored concerns about foreign infiltrations within the ranks of the Communist Party of Kampuchea, which he believed posed a threat to the revolution. Alleged Vietnamese and U.S. spies were considered enemies, leading to extensive purges within the party.

The perceived enemies were dehumanized, and by depicting these groups as enemies of the state or as “class enemies”, the Khmer Rouge justified their extermination as necessary for the advancement of the revolution. This concept is indeed very similar to the Nazi Holocaust, as the Jewish community was depicted as scapegoat of all the evils that Germany was experiencing in the ‘30s. In the Khmer Rouge case, the summit of the

dehumanization can be recognized in the killing fields and facilities of detention and torture as the S21 prison¹⁰.

While in Nazi Germany the struggle was based on race, pitting Aryans against Jews, in Cambodia, the struggle was primarily between social classes, namely the “new people” and the “base people”. The Khmer Rouge sought to totalize society by erasing individual identities and categorizing people based on their perceived allegiance to the regime.

Through forced labor, mass relocations, and ideological indoctrination, the Khmer Rouge aimed to create a unified and obedient population loyal to the party. This totalization process reduced individuals to mere symbols of their perceived threat to the revolution, making them easier targets for extermination.

The events of the Holocaust and the Khmer Rouge genocide are distinct, but according to Hiebert, the process of reconceptualizing collective identity, which drives the decision to commit genocide, is a common thread across seemingly disparate cases. It is likely a shared aspect of many genocides in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (Hiebert, 2008).

The concept of the revolutionary mass-movement regime under single-party auspices provides a framework for understanding how the Khmer Rouge utilized identity construction as a tool for perpetrating genocide. By dehumanizing, totalizing, and internalizing their victims’ identities, the Khmer Rouge justified and perpetuated mass violence in pursuit of their revolutionary goals.

Considering all the topics covered in this chapter is it possible to answer to these research questions: “Which practices of other communist regimes did the Khmer Rouge apply during the genocide? Which are the analogies with other regimes?”. Pol Pot and the Democratic Party of Kampuchea took inspiration from Stalinist, Maoist and Marxist-Leninist practices.

¹⁰ S21, also known as Tuol Sleng, was a high-security prison and interrogation center operated by the Khmer Rouge regime in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. It was used to detain, interrogate, torture, and execute perceived enemies of the regime, including intellectuals, professionals, government officials, and others deemed to be enemies of the revolution. S21 was notorious for its brutal interrogation methods and the systematic torture inflicted upon prisoners. Thousands of people passed through S21, and only a handful survived. Today, it serves as a genocide museum, preserving the memory of the atrocities committed during the Khmer Rouge regime.

However, it appears that the Khmer Rouge selected, adopted and adapted many of the brutal practices from these inspirational regimes, making them their own. All the above-mentioned regimes were characterized by a degree of violence that the Khmer Rouge managed to exceed.

The Marxist-Leninist principles were used for the constitution of the Communist Party of Kampuchea, whilst the concept of class struggle was implemented according to Cambodian social features, literally eliminating class distinctions. The creation of the agricultural collectives was a convergence of the Maoist Great Leap Forward and the Leninist collectivization of property. Regardless of its tragic outcome, the Great Leap Forward was not only imitated but also intensified, particularly with the introduction of widespread violence and discrimination based on both class and deviation from Pol Pot's vision of an "ideal" Cambodian society.

One of the main analogies with other communist regimes that can be identified in the Democratic Kampuchea regime, is the approach towards the enemy that is inspired by Stalinist and Maoist operations. Indeed the enemies of the regime were eliminated with extensive purges, used as labor force in the agricultural collectives, tortured, or even starved to death. There was complete disregard of human life in favor to the ideology of a pure Cambodian society.

Lastly, considering the analogies with other regimes, the regime of Democratic Kampuchea serves as an example of the attempts to replicate certain characteristics of the Nazi and Stalinist regimes.

Although the intention behind this replication remains unclear, the Khmer Rouge strategically employed identity construction as a means to execute genocide, influencing both the behavior of perpetrators and the societal reactions to widespread violence. Through processes of dehumanization, totalization, and internalization of their victims' identities, the Khmer Rouge rationalized and sustained large-scale violence to advance their revolutionary objectives.

When it comes to extensive violence and genocides it is difficult to recognize or understand a reason why these events happen. What ties together the practices observed in the Khmer Rouge regime with those of other communist regimes is the pervasive use

of violence, totalitarian control, political indoctrination, and forced collectivization. These elements converged to create a regime that was not only authoritarian but also deeply repressive and brutal. While each regime may have had its own unique characteristics, these common elements serve to highlight the shared legacy of oppression and brutality that defines many communist regimes throughout history.

3. THE AFTERMATH

The foreign policy of the Communist Party of Kampuchea, also known as the Khmer Rouge, was characterized by isolationism, revolutionary fervor, and anti-imperialism. They pursued a policy of strict neutrality, avoiding alignment with either the Western or the Eastern bloc during the Cold War. However, they were critical of both superpowers and sought to maintain their independence from external influences. The Khmer Rouge government withdrew from international organizations and severed diplomatic ties with many countries, including traditional allies like Vietnam, now considered hostile, however, maintaining the alliance with China.

The foreign policy of the Khmer Rouge towards Vietnam was characterized by suspicion, hostility, and ultimately armed conflict. Indeed, after the fall of Phnom Penh, the relationship between Cambodia and Vietnam deteriorated rapidly due to a combination of territorial disputes and ideological differences. The Khmer Rouge viewed Vietnam as a historical adversary and perceived Vietnamese expansionism as a threat to Cambodian sovereignty. Moreover, Pol Pot's regime suspected Vietnamese ambitions to dominate the region and saw Vietnam's support for Cambodian communist factions as meddling in their internal affairs.

As border clashes intensified throughout 1977 and 1978, the Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia accused Vietnam of territorial incursions and supporting Cambodian factions opposed to their rule, engaging in conflicts outside the Cambodian borders. These tensions reached a boiling point on December 25, 1978, when Vietnam launched a full-scale invasion of Cambodia. The Vietnamese military swiftly advanced, driven by the need to protect ethnic Vietnamese communities and to oust the genocidal Khmer Rouge regime.

On January 6, 1979, Pol Pot fled by helicopter into the Cambodian countryside along with Prince Sihanouk and other high-ranking Khmer Rouge officials, leaving Phnom Penh. They sought to evade capture by Vietnamese forces and regroup in remote areas. The next day Vietnamese forces reached a deserted Phnom Penh, and the Khmer Rouge government officially collapsed. On January 10 the Vietnamese established a pro-Vietnamese government: the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK).

Vietnam installed Heng Samrin¹¹ as the Chairman of the Council of State of the newly established People's Republic of Kampuchea. He served as the de facto leader of Cambodia from 1979 to 1986, holding various leadership positions, including President of the State Presidium. Moreover, under Vietnamese guidance, the PRK government attempted to rebuild Cambodia's shattered infrastructure and institutions.

The Vietnamese invasion and subsequent occupation of Cambodia were met with condemnation from many countries, denouncing the invasion as a violation of Cambodian sovereignty. China, notably, joined in condemning the events, as did the United States, a move seen by some as hypocritical, given their own similar actions just four years prior. The United Nations General Assembly passed resolutions denouncing the Vietnamese intervention, although Vietnam maintained that its actions were necessary to end the atrocities committed by the Khmer Rouge.

On January 10, the Vietnamese soldiers seized control of almost all Cambodia. The freshly established government received prompt recognition from Vietnam, the Soviet Union, and the Eastern European nations aligned with the Soviet bloc. Infuriated by Vietnam's actions, China retaliated by launching an attack on northern Vietnam on February 17th, but it was forced to withdraw a few weeks later (Corfield, 2009).

Following the end of the Khmer Rouge regime, the population was allowed to leave the villages where they had been confined. This led to congested roads as people sought refuge in Thailand, searched for family members, or returned to their homes in Phnom Penh and other cities. Some were able to reclaim their old homes, while others occupied abandoned properties.

However, many found that the cities had been looted by Vietnamese soldiers. Despite these challenges, the primary concern for most was reuniting with family members. As people focused on personal matters, agricultural activities were neglected, leading to food shortages. By the middle of 1979, the country was facing severe famine as a result (Corfield, 2009).

¹¹ Heng Samrin was a member of the Khmer Rouge movement during the 1970s and held various positions within the organization. However, he defected from the Khmer Rouge in 1978 and fled to Vietnam, where he became a key figure in the anti-Khmer Rouge resistance movement.

As previously mentioned, many of Cambodian refugees fled to Thailand, leading to the establishment of large refugee camps along the Thai-Cambodian border. Initially, Thai soldiers repelled the refugees, but as they shared horrible accounts of life under Pol Pot, the situation became more complex.

Some refugees were supporters of Pol Pot, seeking refuge to regroup and fight against Vietnamese and PRK forces. Fearing a potential Vietnamese military advance towards Bangkok, the Thai government, despite criticism, decided to arm Khmer Rouge soldiers to serve as a buffer against Vietnamese forces, a tactical move that invited significant scrutiny from Western diplomats (Corfield, 2009).

The Khmer Rouge set up their operational base along the Thai border, forming the “United Front for Great Solidarity, Patriotic, and Democratic”. Concurrently, a non-communist resistance faction emerged, known as the “Khmer People’s National Liberation Front” (KPNLF) (Documentation Center of Cambodia, 2020).

Despite the Pol Pot regime’s isolation from the outside world, accounts of its atrocities still managed to leak out. Indeed the U.S. was aware of what was happening in Cambodia, and it is demonstrated by a conversation between Kissinger and the foreign minister of Thailand. During the conversation Kissinger explicitly asked: “How many people did he [Ieng Sary] kill? Tens of thousands?”, adding “You [Thailand’s foreign minister] should also tell the Cambodians that we will be friends with them. They are murderous thugs, but we won’t let that stand in our way. We are prepared to improve relations with them”. Moreover, according to Corfield there were leaks of information about what was happening during the regime but they were deemed not sufficient for a U.S. intervention.

According to Haas, Carter was informed about the ongoing genocide in Cambodia. Despite his foreign policy emphasizing human rights, he did not take further action beyond denouncing the regime as “the world’s worst violator of human rights”. He referred the issue to the UN Commission on Human Rights in Geneva and requested the UN Security Council to address the conflict along the Kampuchean-Vietnamese border (Haas, 1991).

During the years of the regime some people managed to escape the collectives and flee to neighboring countries but their testimonies were thought to be exaggerated. Eventually, their version were confirmed once the regime fell.

Following the rupture of ties between the Soviet Union and China, the United States established diplomatic links with China. However, there were controversies surrounding the handling and backing of the conflict between Vietnam and supporters of the Khmer Rouge.

Initially, Carter declared the neutrality of the U.S. in the dispute between Cambodian factions. China, on the contrary, provided economic aid to the Khmer Rouge. While Vietnam and consequently the People's Republic of Kampuchea, were backed by the Soviet Union.

Brzezinski, the National Security Advisor to President Carter, was eager to challenge the Kremlin, and persuaded Bangkok to act as a proxy for the United States against Vietnam. This involved facilitating Chinese aid to support Pol Pot's forces, aiming to prevent Hanoi from achieving victory. Recognizing that the U.S. public wouldn't accept an open alliance with Pol Pot, Brzezinski thought that China and Thailand might be more pragmatic allies.

Consequently, the Khmer Rouge became an ally of China and Thailand, indirectly aligning with the United States (Haas, 1991). This was directly admitted by Brzezinski that said: "I encouraged the Chinese to support Pol Pot. Pol Pot was an abomination. We could never support him, but China could".

Rather than tackling Cambodia's real issues and the human rights abuses it faced, geostrategic concerns and power dynamics were given priority.

3.1. INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE AND POWER GAMES

As the conflict remained intertwined with the dynamics of the Cold War, power struggles overshadowed considerations of justice and human rights.

In 1979, officials from the fallen Pol Pot regime and the PRK government competed for the Cambodian seat in the United Nations. After internal deliberation, the U.S. voted in favor of seating the Khmer Rouge instead of aligning with Moscow and its allies. In 1980,

the U.S. government continued to support the Khmer Rouge as the legitimate representative of the Cambodian people in the UN.

The Regan administration took office in 1981, and it pursued a vigorously anti-communist agenda, viewing the Soviet Union as the primary adversary in the Cold War. His strategy was countering Soviet influence and supporting anti-communist forces globally, eventually prioritizing anti-communist objectives over concerns about human rights and justice.

This ideological stance influenced U.S. policy towards conflicts involving communist regimes, including Cambodia. Regan continued to support the Khmer Rouge as the legitimate representative of Cambodia at the United Nations, despite widespread international condemnation of the regime's atrocities. He provided indirect assistance to the Khmer Rouge through the support for China, Thailand and other regional allies, who in turn provided military aid to the Khmer Rouge. This support bolstered the Khmer Rouge's military capabilities and prolonged their resistance against the Vietnamese-backed government in Cambodia.

Meanwhile, the United States persisted in clandestinely providing financial support to the Khmer Rouge, and for the second year in a row in 1981, the Khmer Rouge was granted Cambodia's UN seat.

The Cambodia UN seat was awarded to the Khmer Rouge from 1979 until 1991. As previously mentioned, this decision was largely due to the geopolitical dynamics of the Cold War era. Despite widespread condemnation of the Khmer Rouge regime for its atrocities, including genocide, several countries, including the United States and China, continued to recognize the Khmer Rouge as the legitimate government of Cambodia.

These countries, motivated by anti-communist ideology and strategic interests, supported the Khmer Rouge diplomatically and lobbied for its representation in international forums, including the United Nations. As a result, the Khmer Rouge retained Cambodia's seat at the UN for over a decade, despite its lack of control over the country and its widespread human rights abuses.

This was mainly possible due to the diplomatic influence that both the U.S. and China enjoyed, engaging in bilateral and multilateral discussions, making diplomatic appeals, and leveraging their political and economic relationships with other countries. The United States and China cultivated alliances with other countries, particularly those in the non-aligned movement and developing world, to garner support for the Khmer Rouge's representation at the UN.

Furthermore, As permanent members of the UN Security Council, both the United States and China had the power to veto any resolutions or decisions regarding Cambodia's representation at the UN. This gave them significant leverage in shaping the international community's response to the Khmer Rouge regime.

Remarkably, they even succeeded in framing their backing of the Khmer Rouge as a component of a larger anti-colonial and anti-imperialist movement, appealing to nations cautious of Western interference. Sadly, this period was marked by a widespread "general amnesia" among international actors, who engaged in power struggles and political maneuvers aimed at concealing the atrocities of a regime, ultimately harming innocent people.

According to Haas, both the Carter and Reagan administrations avoided addressing uncomfortable questions by feigning a lack of leadership regarding Cambodia (Haas, 1991). Still according to Haas, the U.S. policy towards Cambodia could be identified in three factors: the "Vietnam syndrome", the desire to undermine Vietnam and the complexity of the situation.

The "Vietnam syndrome" was the U.S. public's reluctance to support further military engagements, especially in Southeast Asia, eventually influencing the U.S. policy towards Cambodia. The fear of public outcry against renewed military involvement in the region led to a weak response, with the appearance of passive policy being seen as advantageous to mute domestic criticism.

The second factor was the desire to undermine Vietnam, as it already managed to defeated the United States and threatened U.S. allies like Thailand. This desire for revenge and to maintain a powerful yet unpredictable image globally influenced U.S. support for the

Khmer Rouge at the United Nations, even to the point of intimidating other countries into voting in favor.

Lastly, both experts and the general public found themselves bewildered by conflicting claims and unfamiliar actors. Public opinion had minimal influence, leaving the intricacies of Cambodian affairs in the 1980s to a president who was both aggressive yet inattentive, and a State Department that was confused and subordinate. China effectively guided US policymakers by playing on fears of the Soviet Union and Vietnam, rather than encouraging a thorough analysis of long-term US interests in Southeast Asia.

This explanation aligned with the notion that Southeast Asia was not a priority for the United States, with the focus instead on countering the Soviet threat. Consequently, US policy towards Cambodia inadvertently contributed to the expansion of Soviet influence in the region. When questioned about their policy towards Cambodia in the early 1980s, the typical response from the US administration was a declaration that the Cambodian people should be allowed to exercise the right of self-determination (Haas, 1991).

During the International Conference on Kampuchea (ICK), Thailand's Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) allies aimed to draft a declaration calling for the disarmament of the Khmer Rouge under UN supervision. However, China opposed this, and US diplomats pressured ASEAN representatives to accept a UN transition plan that would organize internationally supervised elections without disarming the Khmer Rouge army.

In essence, the proposed peace plan by ICK would have allowed Pol Pot's army ample opportunities to regain power before elections. Instead of crafting a just and realistic peace plan for Cambodia, ICK became a platform to defame Vietnam. Aware of ICK's agenda, even Sihanouk boycotted the conference (Haas, 1991).

Following the collapse of Democratic Kampuchea, one of the most concerning developments was the widespread denial and hesitance to recognize the full scale of the atrocities that occurred. Some individuals and governments, particularly those who had supported the Khmer Rouge during the conflict, downplayed or denied the scale of the genocide.

This denial manifested in various forms, including political maneuvers aimed at downplaying the genocide, attempts to rewrite history to diminish its severity, and the suppression of survivors' voices. Moreover, international responses were initially lukewarm, there was initially a reluctance to acknowledge the genocide due to geopolitical considerations and Cold War dynamics.

Geopolitical considerations overshadowed moral imperatives, which made possible the controversial financial support to the Khmer Rouge. In the "demographic report" produced by the CIA in 1980, the CIA went as far as denying that in the last two years of the Pol Pot regime there had been any executions (Central Intelligence Agency, 1980).

On November 14, 1979, a resolution was voted upon by the United Nations General Assembly, marking the first of numerous resolutions demanding the prompt and unconditional withdrawal of all foreign forces from Cambodia (Corfield, 2009).

Meanwhile, Pol Pot maintained a low profile, but he continued to exert influence within the Khmer Rouge and remained a symbolic figurehead for the movement. Despite the loss of power in the capital, Pol Pot and his loyalists continued to wage a guerrilla war against the Vietnamese-backed government from remote jungle strongholds along the Thai-Cambodian border. Pol Pot's whereabouts remained uncertain for many years, with occasional reports emerging of sightings or encounters with his forces in the Cambodian jungle.

The Khmer rouge offensive was characterized by a lack of impact and peasant support. Unable to engage large Vietnamese forces directly, they operated in small guerrilla units, conducting nighttime raids on bridges, isolated army outposts, and vehicles (Evans & Rowley, 1984).

Under the leadership of Prince Sihanouk, the National United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful, and Cooperative Cambodia (FUNCINPEC) was established. In 1982, FUNCINPEC, along with the KPNLF and the Khmer Rouge (PDK), formed the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK).

Prince Sihanouk served as president, with Khieu Samphan as vice president and Son Sann as prime minister. The primary objective of the CGDK was to unite efforts in liberating

Cambodia from Vietnamese occupation. With the Khmer Rouge as the predominant faction, the CGDK represented Cambodia at the United Nations (Documentation Center of Cambodia, 2020).

The Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea was an unusual alliance. Prince Sihanouk served as the head of state in the government-in-exile, while Son Sann of the KPNLF held the position of prime minister, and Khieu Samphan acted as the foreign minister. Prince Sihanouk's involvement provided the CGDK with international legitimacy and widespread diplomatic acceptance. However, despite this political front, the military conflict was largely dominated by the Khmer Rouge, whose soldiers spearheaded most of the fighting.

The coalition represented a compromise, as it limited the overt role of the Khmer Rouge, recognizing their political unpopularity in the West. China, acknowledging this, supported the coalition as a means to counter Vietnamese expansionism in the region. With Prince Sihanouk at its leadership, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations endorsed Thailand's backing of the CGDK, seeing it as a barrier against Vietnamese influence and dominance in Southeast Asia (Corfield, 2009).

During this period, the People's Republic of Kampuchea encountered numerous challenges. Cambodia's economy was virtually non-existent, necessitating the reintroduction of a currency, a process that was more complicated than expected.

On May 1, 1981, the leaders of the People's Republic of Kampuchea deemed their authority stable enough to conduct elections for their National Assembly. While the candidates were exclusively from the government's People's Revolutionary Party of Kampuchea (PRPK), it marked the first electoral process since 1972. This step toward reestablishing election procedures laid the groundwork for the eventual restoration of democracy in Cambodia twelve years later (Corfield, 2009).

On January 14, 1985, Hun Sen assumed the role of Prime Minister of the People's Republic of Kampuchea, signaling a shift in leadership. In 1986, the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea proposed an eight-point plan aimed at ending the ongoing conflict, but it was rejected by Vietnam. On July 25, 1988, a significant meeting

took place between the CGDK and the PRK, setting the stage for further diplomatic efforts.

February 19, 1989, marked a crucial development as Gareth Evans, the Australian Foreign Minister, guided the Cambodian Peace Plan, emphasizing the importance of a ceasefire, peacekeeping forces, and the establishment of a unified national government until elections could be conducted.

Amidst these diplomatic maneuvers, Hun Sen demonstrated political understanding by convening the PRK's National Assembly on April 29 and 30, 1989, in Phnom Penh. During this assembly, a new constitution was adopted, leading to the renaming of the country as the State of Cambodia, signifying a departure from its previous communist identity. This restructuring included changes to the national flag, anthem, and the declaration of Buddhism as the state religion, alongside the reinstatement of the right to private property (Corfield, 2009).

A significant milestone occurred in September 1989 with the announcement of the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Cambodia. February 26, 1990, marked the establishment of the Supreme National Council (SNC) with the aim of safeguarding Cambodian sovereignty. This council played a crucial role, and its significance was underscored in 1991 when it was granted Cambodia's seat in the United Nations General Assembly. Additionally, the PRPK transformed into the Cambodian People's Party (CPP), abandoning its Marxist-Leninist ideology in favor of portraying itself as a democratic political entity.

The Perm-5 proposal of August 1990 was put forward by the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (United States, United Kingdom, France, China, and Russia). It outlined a United Nations plan for Cambodia, advocating for civilian personnel to oversee key sectors and elections monitored by UN troops, tasked with disarming and demobilizing the Cambodian armies.

In the 1991 version, the plan granted the Khmer Rouge "the same rights, freedoms and opportunities to take part in the electoral process" and aimed to "prohibit retroactive application of criminal law" (United Nations, 1991). However, according to Kiernan, this signaled leniency toward future genocidal regimes, offering immunity from prosecution

in exchange for disarmament (Kiernan, 1993). The Khmer Rouge, unwilling to surrender arms, sought to conceal their troops instead.

The idea of a UN-backed government with international peacekeepers was flawed, as only the Cambodian army could effectively counter the Khmer Rouge, requiring measures like cutting their supply lines in Thailand. Japan's proposals in 1991 aimed to break the deadlock, including UN monitoring from the ceasefire's start and a special commission to investigate the Khmer Rouge.

The US criticized these proposals, fearing they would hinder peace efforts and allow the Khmer Rouge to violate the ceasefire with impunity. This U.S. decision was pivotal: it not only allowed the Khmer Rouge to break the cease-fire without consequences, but there would be no Truth Commission to investigate their severe human rights violations, as opposed to the situation in El Salvador¹².

According to Kiernan, the Cambodia conflict played out on multiple levels, with varying balances of power. While the State of Cambodia prevailed within the country, its opponents had dominance in the UN Security Council. Yet, at the regional level, forces were more evenly distributed, with Southeast Asian nations offering diverse perspectives (Kiernan, 1993).

Despite this, the involvement of great powers hindered a lasting solution, leaving Southeast Asia as the potential site for resolution, although blocked by external influences.

The signing of the Paris Peace Agreements on October 23, 1991, brought an end to the conflicts stemming from the two civil wars that commenced in 1970. These agreements facilitated a comprehensive peace settlement for the country, with United Nations Peacekeepers assuming control of Phnom Penh and subsequently deploying across the nation. The objective was to stabilize Cambodia in anticipation of conducting elections under the auspices of the United Nations (Corfield, 2009).

After the Paris Peace Agreement, the Khmer Rouge found themselves increasingly marginalized and fractured, their once-formidable influence diminishing among shifting

¹² The situation in El Salvador refers to the establishment of a Truth Commission to investigate human rights abuses during the Salvadoran Civil War, providing a mechanism for accountability and reconciliation.

political dynamics. While other factions maneuvered for power within the emerging coalition government, the Khmer Rouge struggled to maintain relevance, their violent past and extreme ideology alienating potential allies.

Internally, the Khmer Rouge faced disunity and power struggles as leaders competed for control and factions splintered. This internal strife weakened their military capabilities and organizational coherence, hastening their decline. Externally, they lost crucial support as geopolitical realities shifted. With the end of the Cold War, the general amnesia faded as their primary backer, China, but also the U.S., recalibrated its foreign policy priorities, diminishing support for the Khmer Rouge.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the landscape of global politics underwent a profound transformation, prompting key players like the United States and China to reassess their strategies and alliances, particularly in regions like Southeast Asia.

The change in the leadership of the Soviet Union in 1985 marked a significant shift in the country's foreign policy. Gorbachev's reforms in Soviet domestic and foreign policies had far-reaching effects across the Cold War landscape, defusing tensions between the two major powers. Cambodia was among the arenas affected by these changes.

To gain a deeper insight into the international developments of that time, it is crucial to understand the transformations that occurred within the Soviet Union. The policies implemented by Gorbachev stemmed from his vision for reforming and revitalizing the Soviet Union, they centered on “uskorenie” (acceleration), “perestroika” (reconstruction, with evolving meanings), and “glasnost” (openness or transparency).

Under Gorbachev's leadership “uskorenie” represented a comprehensive effort to revitalize the Soviet economy and propel it towards greater prosperity and competitiveness on the global stage. It implied enhancing quality through the adoption of innovative technology, this policy wasn't particularly successful and was eventually put aside.

According to Gorbachev, “perestroika” represented a comprehensive program aimed at reforming and modernizing the Soviet economic and political system. At first it was used as a forwarder to implement reforms, introducing elements of market socialism and

decentralization. While it contributed to economic, social, and political reforms, the primary impact of this policy was felt in foreign relations. Brown affirms that the term was interpreted variably as either a profound restructuring or simply modernization of the existing system, carrying diverse meanings for different individuals, and even for the same individuals at different points in time (Brown, 2011).

The “New Thinking” policy, introduced by Gorbachev in the mid-1980s, marked a significant departure from the previous Soviet approach to foreign relations. It emphasized the need for dialogue, cooperation, and mutual understanding between the Soviet Union and the Western powers, particularly the United States.

This shift in approach was driven by Gorbachev’s recognition of the economic and social challenges facing the Soviet Union and his desire to reform the country’s foreign policy to address these issues.

According to Brown, the “New Thinking” also recognized the existential threat posed by nuclear war, acknowledging that such a conflict would not discriminate based on social class but would devastate all of humanity (Brown, 2011). Gorbachev’s vision called for a recognition of shared goals and cooperative efforts to address global challenges, emphasizing the importance of collective security and collaboration among nations.

From these assumptions emerged the vision of a “Common European Home”. According to Taubman, Gorbachev’s intentions aspired to bridge the East-West divide in Europe. This ambitious endeavor aimed to dismantle both NATO and the Warsaw Pact, uniting the entire continent, including the United States, under a common framework (Taubman, 2017). Although the latter was unsuccessful, the “Common European Home” laid the foundation for the positive rapport with the Western nations, eventually easing the tensions of the Cold War.

Given the strain of the Cold War’s “hot conflicts”, Gorbachev acknowledged the heavy toll that the arms race imposed on the Soviet economy. Hence, the strategic arms reduction talks with the United States held immense significance. Indeed, the Soviet Union had all interests in closing direct or proxy battlegrounds as Afghanistan, Vietnam, Cambodia and Nicaragua.

However, both Gorbachev and Regan collaborated for a de-escalation of the tension between the two countries eventually reaching an agreement over the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty. The INF Treaty was a crucial step in reducing Cold War tensions and lessening the risk of nuclear confrontation between the two superpowers. It led to the verifiable destruction of thousands of missiles and launchers and helped stabilize the security environment in Europe.

The changing geopolitical landscape in Southeast Asia, influenced by Gorbachev's policies, also affected the dynamics of the Cambodian conflict.

With the Soviet Union scaling back its support for communist regimes, neighboring countries like Vietnam, which had previously been aligned with the Soviet bloc, faced increased pressure to withdraw from Cambodia. The geopolitical changes resulting from the Soviet Union's collapse created opportunities for diplomatic initiatives that led to the resolution of the conflict and the withdrawal of Vietnamese forces from Cambodia in 1989.

The fall of the Soviet Union between 1990 and 1991, and the consequent end of the Cold War, was an indirect consequence of Gorbachev's policies implementations.

For the United States, the end of the Cold War marked a shift away from the ideological battlegrounds that had defined its foreign policy for decades. With the weakening of communism's power, there was less urgency to support anti-communist movements like the Khmer Rouge. Moreover, the atrocities committed by the Khmer Rouge regime became increasingly impossible to ignore, aligning with a growing emphasis on human rights in international relations.

Similarly, China's perspective evolved in the post-Soviet era. While it had been a trusty supporter of the Khmer Rouge, seeing them as allies against Vietnam and a buffer against Soviet influence, the changing geopolitical dynamics prompted a recalibration of priorities. As China sought to focus on economic development and forge diplomatic ties with neighboring nations, the strategic imperative of backing insurgent groups waned.

Thus, the fall of the Soviet Union was crucial, as it fundamentally altered the calculus for both the United States and China regarding support for the Khmer Rouge. It opened a

new era of diplomacy characterized by a nuanced approach to regional stability, human rights considerations, and the pursuit of constructive engagement over ideological proxy conflicts, eventually placing the United States as the new guarantor of international order.

Amid military pressure and waning international backing, many Khmer Rouge soldiers surrendered or defected, further eroding the movement's strength. Some disillusioned members abandoned the cause, seeking amnesty and reintegrating into civilian life.

While remnants of the Khmer Rouge persisted in remote areas, their threat diminished significantly. The post-Paris Peace Agreement era saw a concerted effort to rebuild Cambodia, foster reconciliation, and establish democratic governance, with the Khmer Rouge's influence gradually fading.

3.2. THE ROLE OF THE UNITED NATIONS AND THE COURT CASES

Following extensive negotiations, all parties involved in the Cambodian conflict reached a historic peace agreement in Paris on October 23, 1991. The agreement outlined plans for a national election overseen by the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC).

Despite this landmark accord, according to the Documentation Center of Cambodia, the Khmer Rouge opted to boycott the UN-sanctioned election and resisted demobilizing their forces. Consequently, Khmer Rouge soldiers remained engaged in combat against the troops of the Royal Government of Cambodia, which was elected in 1993 (Documentation Center of Cambodia, 2020).

In the 1991 Cambodian elections, no single party secured an outright majority. As a result, Cambodia remained under the supervision of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia until the situation could be resolved and a stable government could be formed.

The UNTAC was implemented with a range of different controversies which impacted its effectiveness and overall outcome.

Despite their generous salaries and comfortable living conditions, many UN staff members in Cambodia failed to significantly contribute to the country's development.

Instead, for some, their assignment seemed to serve as little more than a lucrative opportunity before moving on to the next operation, with minimal impact on the local population.

Disagreements between different factions within UNTAC, particularly among the French and Australians competing for influence, added to the challenges faced by the mission (Corfield, 2009). According to Corfield, Both the French and Australians were eager to exert influence over Cambodia once the United Nations mission concluded.

One of the few successful projects undertaken by the UN was the resettlement of the hundreds of thousands of refugees along the Thai-Cambodian border. These refugees were relocated to new villages within Cambodia, provided with basic necessities and agricultural tools, and given training in farming techniques, enabling them to establish themselves in their new surroundings.

However, as the UNTAC presence in Cambodia expanded, reports began to emerge of misconduct among certain staff members. Instances of corruption, theft of UN equipment, and security lapses tarnished the organization's reputation and undermined its effectiveness. Despite the initial goodwill upon their arrival, the failure to hold wrongdoers accountable eroded public trust in the UN's presence in Cambodia.

Furthermore, the refusal of Democratic Kampuchea forces to disarm and their subsequent formation of a new political party, coupled with support from external allies like China and elements within the Thai military, posed significant challenges to the peace process and upcoming elections in 1993.

The UN program of disarmament of rural militias impeded their ability to protect against the Khmer Rouge, leaving these communities vulnerable to attacks without any means of self-defense. The militias served as the primary defense in provincial areas, often organized to fend off Khmer Rouge attacks.

However, the disarmament process rendered them ineffective, leaving the population vulnerable to Khmer Rouge forces. This allowed the Khmer Rouge to exploit the legitimacy granted to them by the peace plan, enabling them to establish a widespread guerrilla network across the territory.

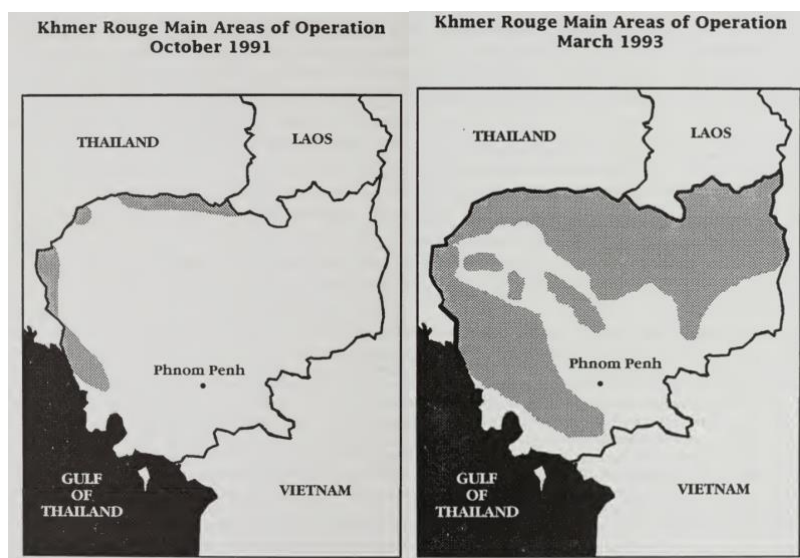


Figure 3.1 - Genocide and Democracy in Cambodia

As previously mentioned, after the ceasefire in 1991, the Khmer Rouge breached the agreement by refusing to disarm and continuing their military activities. They launched military attacks on government forces and civilians, especially in rural areas where they still had influence, seeking to destabilize the peace process and undermine the authority of the newly established government.

These actions included ambushes, assassinations, violent acts and aimed at asserting their control and influence over Cambodian territory. They seized control of certain territories and established their presence, exploiting the uncertainty and power vacuum created by the ceasefire.

On March 7, 1992, Sihanouk criticized the Khmer Rouge for intentionally obstructing the peace process, attributing all the arising difficulties to their actions. He emphasized that without the presence of the Khmer Rouge, there would be no need for UNTAC, disregarding the UN Perm-5's decision to involve them in the process. Four days later, during a visit to Phnom Penh, U.S.

Assistant Secretary of State Richard Solomon also expressed frustration over the Khmer Rouge's lack of cooperation with the UN settlement process, obstructing UN access and withholding information crucial for the disarmament and demobilization of soldiers (Kiernan, 1993).

In the election held on May 25, 1993, the FUNCINPEC emerged as the largest party, winning 58 out of 120 seats in the National Assembly, followed by the Cambodian People's Party (CPP) with 51 seats.

Despite not winning the most seats, Hun Sen of the CPP remained in power through a coalition agreement with FUNCINPEC. This coalition government, with Prince Norodom Ranariddh as First Prime Minister and Hun Sen as Second Prime Minister, marked the beginning of a new era of governance in Cambodia, transitioning the country towards democracy and stability after years of conflict.

In 1994, the Khmer Rouge began kidnapping tourists visiting Cambodia and its temples, exploiting the country's appeal to both backpackers and wealthier travelers. The opening of Cambodia to tourism also brought about the proliferation of drugs and underage prostitution in the country, further exacerbating Cambodian's difficulties and living conditions.

The presence of the United Nations contributed to restore business confidence. Property prices in Phnom Penh rivaled those of New York, with new hotels, restaurants, nightclubs, and brothels springing up everywhere. The peace process ushered in a market-driven economy solely focused on profit. Within a short span, Cambodia became a hub for speculators, primarily Chinese from Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur, and Singapore (Terzani, 1995).

Exploiting rampant corruption within the local administration, they seized control of the country's natural resources, such as timber, minerals, and agricultural land, without adequate regard for sustainable practices or environmental conservation. They also engaged in illicit activities, ranging from dealing in expired medications to smuggling cars and precious gems.

The implementation of capitalist principles led to widening economic disparities between different segments of society, with wealth concentrated in the hands of a few individuals or corporations. Cambodian workers were exploited as they had low wages, poor working conditions, and limited rights for labor unions.

Finally, only in 1997, initial measures were taken to hold the Khmer Rouge responsible for their atrocities. Cambodia sought assistance from the United Nations to establish a trial for prosecuting senior Khmer Rouge leaders (Documentation Center of Cambodia, 2020). In the same year Son Sen was arrested by Ta Mok's¹³ forces during an internal power struggle within the Khmer Rouge. Son Sen, along with his family, was executed under orders from Pol Pot.

On April 15, 1998, Pol Pot died while under house arrest in a Khmer Rouge stronghold in northern Cambodia.

In November 1998, the UN dispatched a team of experts to Cambodia and Thailand to assess the crimes committed during the Khmer Rouge era. The experts found substantial physical evidence and testimonies supporting criminal proceedings against the Khmer Rouge leadership. They recommended the creation of an ad hoc international tribunal mandated by the UN to investigate and prosecute allegations of genocide and crimes against humanity. While Cambodia preferred a domestic court to handle these crimes, the international community favored an international tribunal (Documentation Center of Cambodia, 2020).

In March 1999, Ta Mok was captured near the Thai border by the Cambodian army and subsequently imprisoned. According to the Documentation Center of Cambodia, at the time of Ta Mok's arrest all surviving Khmer Rouge leaders either surrendered or were arrested, leading to the complete collapse of the movement. In May of the same year Duch¹⁴ was detained by Cambodian authorities and remained in military custody until 2007.

In 2001, the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC) was established. It was a domestic court, tasked with trying individuals for serious crimes during the

¹³ Ta Mok, originally known as Chhit Choeun, was born in 1926 in Takeo province. From 1968 to 1978, he held the position of secretary of the Southwest Zone.

In November 1978, Ta Mok was appointed as the second deputy secretary of the CPK. Despite the fall of Democratic Kampuchea, he neither sought amnesty nor attempted defection.

¹⁴ Duch, original name Kaing Guek Eav, was born in 1945 in Kampong Thom. Joining the Communist Party of Kampuchea in 1970, he eventually became the head of the notorious Khmer Rouge security center known as S-21 (Tuol Sleng).

In the 1980s, Duch defected from the Khmer Rouge and converted to Christianity (Documentation Center of Cambodia, 2020).

Khmer Rouge era (1975–1979). In 2003, an agreement between the UN and the Cambodian government outlined international involvement in the ECCC. While the court would operate under Cambodian law, it would have international participation and adhere to global standards of justice.

Overall, the ECCC operates under Cambodian law but incorporates international standards of justice and includes both Cambodian and international personnel, ensuring impartiality, credibility and independence from both the Cambodian government and the UN. Due to its complexity, the structure of the ECCC presented several challenges and potential problems in ensuring fair trials for the accused individuals.

Despite efforts to maintain independence, there were concerns about political interference given that the court operated within the Cambodian legal system, which had its own political dynamics. Another issue was the scarcity of legal expertise in handling complex criminal trials, particularly those involving international law, due to the aftermath of the Khmer Rouge regime.

Language barriers also posed a significant challenge, as the court comprised both Cambodian and international judges and legal officers, potentially hindering effective communication during proceedings. Moreover, resource constraints, including funding and personnel shortages, could have impacted the thoroughness of investigations and the provision of adequate legal representation.

Additionally, navigating cultural and legal differences between the national and international components of the court presented obstacles. Balancing sovereignty with international standards of justice required delicate negotiation to avoid misunderstandings or disputes among judges and legal staff.

In 2007 Nuon Chea, Ieng Sary and Khieu Samphan were arrested.

In August 2008, Duch was indicted with war crimes and harming foreign nationals during the Democratic Kampuchea regime, and his trial commenced in March 2009.

Given his role as former head of the Khmer Rouge's S-21 Security Center in Phnom Penh, in July 2010, the Trial Chamber found Duch guilty of crimes against humanity including persecution on political grounds, extermination (encompassing murder), enslavement,

imprisonment, torture and other inhumane acts and grave breaches of the 1949 Geneva Conventions in Case 001. He was sentenced to 35 years in prison. However, this was commuted into life imprisonment by the Supreme Court Chamber in 2012 upon appeal by the Co-Prosecutors. The Supreme Court Chamber cited legal errors in the Trial Chamber's decision, emphasizing the gravity of Duch's crimes and the inadequacy of mitigating circumstances in determining his sentence (Documentation Center of Cambodia, 2020).

On August 7, 2014, in Case 002/01, the Trial Chamber convicted Nuon Chea and Khieu Samphan of crimes against humanity, including extermination (which covers murder), persecution based on political grounds, and other inhumane acts such as forced transfer, enforced disappearances, and attacks against human dignity. They were both sentenced to life imprisonment.

Although the Supreme Court Chamber overturned part of their convictions, their life sentences were upheld (Documentation Center of Cambodia, 2020). According to the website of the ECCC, the evidentiary hearings for Case 002/02 involving Nuon Chea and Khieu Samphan ended on January 11, 2017, followed by the closing statements held from June 13 to June 22, 2017. In 2019 Nuon Chea died while serving his sentence.

Ieng Sary, also known as "Brother Number Three" in the Khmer Rouge hierarchy, faced a different fate. He was arrested in 2007 along with his wife, Ieng Thirith, on charges of crimes against humanity and war crimes. However, Ieng Sary died of natural causes in 2013 before the conclusion of his trial. Due to the ECCC's Internal Rules, his death nullified any civil proceedings so he was never formally convicted by a court of law for the crimes he was charged with (Documentation Center of Cambodia, 2020).

In November 2011, the Trial Chamber ruled that Ieng Thirith was unfit to stand trial due to a progressive, degenerative illness. Consequently, the case against her was separated and suspended. However, there was disagreement among the international and Cambodian Trial Chamber judges regarding her continued detention or release conditions. To avoid confusion, the Trial Chamber unanimously decided to release her in September 2012. It was emphasized that being unfit for trial did not imply guilt or innocence. Nevertheless, the Supreme Court mandated judicial supervision during her release. Ieng

Thirith passed away from natural causes on August 22, 2015 (Documentation Center of Cambodia, 2020).

Case 003 involved Meas Muth, a former naval commander of the Khmer Rouge regime and Sou Met. They were initially linked to Case 003, but legal proceedings against Sou Met ended due to his death in June 2015. Meas Muth, indicted in March 2015, appeared before the judge voluntarily in December 2015 for additional charges. However, the Co-Investigating Judges disagreed on whether Meas Muth falls under the ECCC's jurisdiction as a senior leader or one of the most responsible for crimes during the Democratic Kampuchea era. Conversely, the International Co-Investigating Judge found Meas Muth subject to the ECCC's jurisdiction, citing ample evidence for indictment on various charges.

In Case 004, three individuals were charged: Im Chaem, Ao An, and Yim Tith. The case was split into three separate files, each for one of the charged individuals. On February 22, 2017, Case 004/1 against Im Chaem was dismissed by the Co-Investigating Judges. Subsequently, on July 20, 2017, the International Co-Prosecutor appealed the Co-Investigating Judges' closing order in Case 004/01 to the Pre-Trial Chamber. Investigation against Ao An in Case 004/02 concluded on December 16, 2016. The judicial inquiry into Yim Tith in the residual Case 004 is ongoing.

The trials to the Khmer Rouge were a sort of consolation price. Considering the extension of the atrocities committed during Democratic Kampuchea, Cambodian citizens deserved better than the outcome of the trials. By the time the trials were held, the leaders of the Khmer Rouge had spent their lifetime free and unpunished, their crimes unaccounted for. Pol Pot, the architect of the suffering and atrocities perpetrated during the regime, ultimately escaped justice and died of natural causes in old age, together with Ieng Sary and other Khmer Rouge cadres.

Eventually, on November 16, 2018, the Cambodian and international judges of the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia jointly concluded that the regime led by Pol Pot, the former Khmer Rouge leader, had committed genocide in Cambodia during its rule from 1975 to 1979 (Yale University Cambodian Genocide Program, 2018).

The instability within the country, coupled with the foreign interests of other nations, played significant roles in the prolonged delay in establishing a dedicated trial mechanism and in holding individuals accountable for their actions.

There are several factors that had an impact on the verdicts of the ECCC. The time factor was crucial on the effectiveness of the ECCC. First of all, the considerable delay of 30 years between the events and the trials hindered the accountability of the leaders, compounded by the inability to prosecute some due to their deaths or advanced age. As the investigations unfolded, gathering evidence became increasingly challenging due to the vast changes undergone by both the population and the country over the course of 30 years, compounded by the complexity of the charges. The lengthy timeframe and the country's tumultuous history made uncovering sufficient evidence a formidable task.

However, the challenges that the ECCC had to face were considerable, starting from the legal complexities of prosecuting crimes committed decades earlier, including issues related to evidence collection, witness testimony, and legal interpretations. It operated with limited financial resources and staffing, which hindered its ability to conduct thorough investigations, manage caseloads efficiently, and provide adequate support for victims and witnesses. Nevertheless, there were many differences of opinions between the international prosecutors and the nationals one undermining the effectiveness and the capability of the ECCC to achieve appropriate rulings, as seen in the previously mentioned cases.

Upon revisiting the third research question outlined in the initial section of this dissertation: "In which way the international actors reacted to the post-genocide situation? And how did they involve themselves in the reconstruction of this wounded country?" it is possible to draw the conclusions of the findings presented in this chapter.

The international actors, namely the United States, China, Vietnam, the Soviet Union and the United Nations had a deep and determinant impact on the aftermath of the genocide. In this chapter, it was possible to observe that, in the context for the Cold War, every action had to be weighted in relation to the opponent, eventually at the cost of Cambodian life and justice.

Both the Soviet Union and the U.S. capitalized on the Cambodian situation to assert their spheres of influence. While this conduct is unsurprising, given the geopolitical context, it also demonstrated a blatant disregard for civilian welfare, further exacerbating an already precarious situation and showing a complete disregard for human rights.

The international response to the Khmer Rouge genocide fell short of expectations, with many actors opting to overlook the atrocities rather than condemn the perpetrators. The rivalry between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, particularly in relation to Vietnam, resulted in economic and political support for the Khmer Rouge through the newly formed U.S.-China coalition, further complicating efforts to address the humanitarian crisis.

To answer the question: “In which way the international actors reacted to the post-genocide situation?” it is important to distinguish the two timeframes: before and after the fall of the Soviet Union. Indeed, this event is fundamental to the establishment of the international order.

Prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States were driven by their desire to assert dominance on the global stage, against the Soviet Union. This led to a series of policies and actions aimed at undermining the legitimacy of the Vietnamese-backed government in Cambodia. In pursuit of this goal, the U.S. indirectly supported the Khmer Rouge through channels like China and Thailand, providing economic and military assistance while also downplaying and obscuring the atrocities committed by the Khmer Rouge.

During this period of time, the United Nations were paralyzed, as China and the U.S. vetoed against the Soviet Union. Moreover, given the fact that the Cambodian seat was awarded to the Khmer Rouge, Cambodian citizens were left out the international sphere.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, international actors began to confront the atrocities committed by the Khmer Rouge, as the veil of amnesia lifted. This shift was facilitated by the efforts of reporters and scholars who documented the horrors, alongside the testimonies of the devastated Cambodian population.

The overdue acknowledgment of Khmer Rouge crimes, coupled with the provision of weapons, posed a significant challenge for Cambodia. The leaders of the Khmer Rouge

were afforded time to regroup and integrate with newly established government factions, thereby obscuring some of their past atrocities or evading accountability by fleeing or going into hiding.

It is disheartening and particularly dangerous that international actors contributed to concealing a genocide rather than condemning it. Regardless of political or ideological differences, events of such magnitude should be swiftly addressed and condemned. The cover-up could lead to the legitimization of certain behaviors and, ultimately, encourage their continuation, exacerbating the situation, as was the case in Cambodia.

Addressing now the second research question of this chapter: “How did the international actors involve themselves in the reconstruction of this wounded country?”. Despite criticism, the UN mission in Cambodia undoubtedly contributed to providing some stability to the country.

The UNTAC facilitated the relocation of refugees and displaced persons from various parts of Cambodia and refugee camps in neighboring countries. Additionally, it assisted in distributing basic resources and jumpstarting the country’s economy, addressing issues such as famine and sanitation. However, it failed in dismantle the Khmer Rouge, as they continued to spread havoc and killings in the countryside, as well as preventing the proper performance of the UN mission.

However, considered the needs of the Cambodian population, the UNTAC mission was just a patch, as it did not address the constitution of a stable government but it only guaranteed elections. It did not help in the establishment of a solid economy nor a functioning administration let alone holding the Khmer Rouge accountable for their crimes or reducing their attacks. Following the departure of the UNTAC mission, other foreign states eagerly sought to exploit the undeveloped Cambodian market, intensifying existing social inequalities, poverty, and divisions among citizens while also fueling corruption.

The consequences of the failure of the UNTAC mission can be still seen today, as the country slow recovery is not yet fully completed. Establishing a UN mission required consensus among various Cambodian and international factions, which proved

challenging, given their divergent interests. Additionally, the limited duration of the mission made it difficult to enact substantial and enduring changes in the country.

At the end of the United Nations mission, there was a general lack of interest from Western countries in helping Cambodia. Unfortunately, this fate is characteristic of all countries considered to be part of the third world. Foreign countries prioritized exploiting opportunities Cambodia could offer them rather than aiding the nation in overcoming the ongoing condition of misery it still faces today.

4. CONCLUSIONS

In this dissertation, I intended to understand how the international factor, identified in countries external to Cambodia, had an impact on the occurrences before, during and after the genocide. In a globalized context is important to understand the external and international context surrounding specific events, as these can directly or indirectly influence the observed event. Within this framework, geopolitical turmoil, particularly the Cold War, hold significant importance over the progression of events linked to the Democratic Kampuchea's genocide.

The research questions were designed to conceal a deeper comprehension of how the international dynamics impacted and, in certain cases altered, the course of events that characterized the Cambodian genocide.

Each of the three research questions delved into a corresponding timeframe. The initial question, "How the international actors affected and determined the rise of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia?" investigated in the first chapter, aimed to uncover the pivotal factors contributing to the Communist Party of Kampuchea's rise to power.

Analyzing the historical framework it was possible to identify five main international actors: the United States, the Soviet Union, China, Vietnam and France. However, the United States proved to be a crucial actor, eventually determining the rise of the Communist Party of Kampuchea to power. Indeed, the "operation menu", the extensive bombings campaign on Cambodia launched in response to the infiltration of North Vietnamese forces in the country, played a significant role in shifting the Cambodian citizens perspective toward the Khmer Rouge.

Pol Pot demonstrated extreme cunning by capitalizing on the complexities of the situation in his favor. He exploited the carpet bombings in Cambodia, either fueling a sense of frustration or cultivating hatred towards the U.S. when the devastation caused by the bombings was revealed to the citizens. Essentially, the U.S. indirectly provided the Khmer Rouge the perfect pretext for the citizens to join their cause.

Indeed, other actors such as China, the Soviet Union, and both North and South Vietnam played significant roles in supporting and financing the rise of the Khmer Rouge. However, the intervention of the United States was proven to be fundamental.

Unfortunately, the atrocities resulting from the indiscriminate carpet bombings of Cambodia were never fully acknowledged, as the situation was overlooked, ensuring that the Khmer Rouge genocide overshadowed the actions of the United States. Nevertheless, the indiscriminate bombing of a neutral country and its innocent civilians is considered a war crime by the Charter of the International Military Tribunal.

The Second research question was: “Which practices of other communist regimes did the Khmer Rouge apply during the genocide? Which are the analogies with other regimes?”, aimed at better understanding of the atrocities and policies committed by Democratic Kampuchea. The scale of the events and atrocities was unprecedented in Cambodia. To grasp the reasons and motives behind the policies implemented by the Khmer Rouge, it is crucial to understand the theoretical framework underlying their actions.

The second chapter identifies a strong correlation between the ideology of the Khmer Rouge and the Maoist collectivization of land and creation of agricultural communities, aimed at creating a rural classless society focused on the cultivation and exportation of rice. However, the Cambodian Leap Forward represented an escalation of the Chinese plan, marked by increased violence, class struggle, and even less effectiveness. This was evident in the setting of unsustainable targets and the population’s inability to cultivate rice in a devastated land.

When considering the repression towards the enemies of Angkar, the most glaring similarity between the DK regime and others lies in its resemblance to Stalinism and Nazism. All three regimes were characterized by the extensive use of violence, discrimination of the enemy, the “other”, eventually eradicated through extensive purges, conscripted into forced labor in agricultural collectives, subjected to torture, or even left to starve. The regime targeted the intellectuals, the soldiers and officials of the previous government, intellectuals and whoever opposed to their rule, implementing a strict form of totalitarianism.

Understanding the motives behind mass killings and totalitarian repression can be challenging, but we can discern certain characteristics that, unfortunately, are common to such regimes. Despite significant differences among various regimes, totalitarian regimes share similarities in their approaches to dehumanizing, totalizing, and internalizing the identities of their victims. These tactics are eventually used by leaders to rationalize and justify atrocities.

The third research question is similar to the first one, as it aims to understand the context of the aftermath of the genocide. The question: “In which way the international actors reacted to the post-genocide situation? And how did they involve themselves in the reconstruction of this wounded country?”, is designed to comprehend the context of foreign actors. As previously mentioned, if the Cold War played a role in the rise of the Khmer Rouge, its significance became even more pronounced after the regime’s downfall.

Following the overthrow of the Khmer Rouge, international political forces, particularly the dynamics of the Cold War, played a crucial role in resolving the situation. It is important to differentiate between two distinct timeframes: before and after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Right after the fall of the Khmer Rouge, the Soviet forces sided with the new established Vietnamese government, this provoked the reactions of the Western forces, mainly the United States who, along with China and Thailand, opposed this alliance and supported the Khmer Rouge. Thus, the actions of the two factions hindered a swift resolution of the conflict and exacerbated the already dire humanitarian crisis facing the Cambodian people, besides preventing the accountability of the atrocities of the Khmer Rouge.

Similarly to the first chapter, the dynamics of the Cold War hindered politicians from intervening in defense of human rights and innocent people, instead prioritizing the advancement of one side over the other. Despite the media attention, Western governments engaged in covering up and concealing the atrocities committed by the Khmer Rouge, prioritizing the defense of a political ideology.

However, with the initiation of dialogues between the Soviet Union and the U.S., the situation underwent a transformation. The tensions between the two spheres of influence diminished, culminating in the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. Subsequently, the

atrocities committed by the Khmer Rouge regained political attention. The focus on genocide issues could no longer be diverted.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States assumed the role of new guarantor of the international order, consequently forced to take on the responsibility of addressing all unresolved conflicts and cases of genocide. However, the issue of genocide in Cambodia was not addressed until 1997. Moreover, the formal request for the investigation came from the Cambodian government, rather than initiating as a spontaneous investigation by the United Nations themselves. In comparison, both the Rwandan and the Somalian genocides were promptly addressed. Indeed, thanks to the media attention that the cases received and the fact that the Cold War had long since ended, the international response was decidedly more prompt and rapid.

The trials of the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia proved to be a small win for the Cambodian people, as the individuals sentenced for their crimes were far fewer than those responsible for the atrocities committed. Furthermore, considering the health and old age of the defendants, the convictions that were secured were almost insignificant.

The example of Cambodia can serve as a starting point to identify similar cases in which the global dynamics exerted or still exert a profound influence on regional events, ultimately altering the trajectory of the country.

However it is also important to mention the inefficiency of the UN, completely frozen during the Cold War. The repercussions of the UNTAC mission's failure are still evident today, as the country's slow recovery remains incomplete. The establishment of a UN mission required consensus among various Cambodian and international factions, which proved challenging due to their divergent interests. Additionally, the limited duration of the mission made it difficult to enact substantial and lasting changes in the country.

In consideration of the needs of the Cambodian population, the UNTAC mission was merely a temporary fix. It failed to address the establishment of a stable government and only ensured the conduct of elections. Moreover, it did not contribute to the development of a robust economy or an effective administration, nor did it hold the Khmer Rouge accountable for their crimes or reduce their attacks. After the departure of the UNTAC

mission, other foreign states eagerly sought to exploit the underdeveloped Cambodian market, exacerbating existing social inequalities, poverty, and divisions among citizens while also fueling corruption.

As already mentioned in this dissertation, it is disheartening and particularly alarming that international actors chose to conceal a genocide rather than condemn it. Regardless of political or ideological differences, events of such magnitude should be promptly addressed and unequivocally condemned. The cover-up may lead to the legitimization of certain behaviors and, ultimately, encourage their perpetuation, exacerbating the situation, as was witnessed in Cambodia.

Once again, international forces have overridden the human rights of a population. This situation is deeply concerning as it highlights how the international context and external forces, influenced by political and ideological alignments, can significantly impact internal dynamics within a country.

However, when such issues involve human rights, it is imperative to address them promptly. If a country or an organization such as the United Nations stands as guarantors of human rights, they cannot afford to make distinctions between populations, as these rights are universal and indispensable, irrespective of race, political affiliations, gender, or ideologies. Otherwise, we would be discussing privileges, not universal rights.

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