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**THE UN INTERVENTION IN CAMBODIA:
A GLASS HALF EMPTY OR A GLASS HALF FULL?**

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Abstract

This paper contends that the United Nations' (UN) intervention in Cambodia had little long-term impact on that country, and that the greatest value of the mission will ultimately be realized from lessons learned that could be applicable to future peace support operations. In a virtually constant state of war since the 1960s, Cambodia served as a proxy battleground in the conflict over ideologies that characterized several Asian and Af

A bad peace is even worse than war.¹

-P. Cornelius Tacitus, *The Annals*, c. AD 96

The problems associated with finding peaceful and lasting solutions to conflict have confronted soldiers and politicians since ancient times. While history is replete with examples of wars successfully waged and won, it has often been the victor's ability to "anticipate and devise means to cope with the issues of the future"² that has determined whether or not the peace would endure. In recent times, the study of this transition from peace to war has been labelled conflict resolution, a specialist's field that has come of age in the post-Cold War era. Defined in its most basic sense, "[c]onflict resolution is a...comprehensive term which implies that the deep-rooted sources of conflict are addressed, and resolved."³ For this to occur, institutions and support structures must be put in place to prevent a reversion to armed conflict. Furthermore, the fundamental tenets associated with peace – personal safety, law and order, human rights, and economic progress – must take root.

The importance of conflict resolution in the post-Cold War order is, arguably, more significant than it has ever been. With the dramatic rise in both intra-state and inter-state conflict, the establishment of lasting peace is vital to the prevention of future conflict and escalation on a grander scale. The United Nations (UN) and regional security organizations have an essential role to play in this regard, a role that was underscored by UN Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali who stated that the international community must take "action to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict."⁴

Aim

The aim of this paper is to demonstrate that the benefits derived from the UN intervention in Cambodia may ultimately be of greater value to the UN itself than to Cambodia. In doing so, the origins of the conflict and the catalyst for peace will be reviewed. This will be followed by an overview of the ends, ways and means employed by the UN and an analysis of the results. Although there were no clear divisions between the strategic, operational and tactical levels during this intervention, the analysis will focus on the actions and decisions of the operational authorities in theatre including the Special Representative to the Secretary-General (SRSG) and the Military Component Commander. The paper will conclude with both a summary of lessons learned that may be applicable to future conflict resolution scenarios, and a summary of the major flaws, in both planning and execution, that marginalized the effectiveness of the UN in Cambodia. Annexes A, B and C are provided to assist the reader with the geography, timelines and organizational structure that will be discussed.

Background

Cambodia had experienced war – either civil or inter-state – almost continuously since durin(tym(, Pol P

with the United States, who continued to bomb Viet Cong bases and lines of communication in Cambodia until April 1975. This bombing, some of the most intense in history, not only created a huge wave of refugees that fled to neighbouring Thailand, but also served to weaken and undermine popular support for the Lon Nol government.⁵

Lon Nol was overthrown by Pol Pot in 1975, and the Khmer Rouge directed a regime of auto-genocide that ultimately cost the lives of some one million Cambodians. The Khmer Rouge became increasingly bloodthirsty, and crossed into Vietnam in 1977 where they massacred hundreds of villagers. In December of 1978, the Vietnamese invaded Cambodia, beginning what is often described as “Vietnam’s Vietnam.”⁶ The Khmer Rouge retreated west, establishing jungle bases on the Thai border. Once the Khmer Rouge had fled the cities, a Vietnamese-backed puppet government was established in Phnom Penh. This government was not recognized by the West, but was by the Soviets who sought to reduce Chinese influence in Southeast Asia. Throughout most of the 1980s, a long and often bloody civil war ensued as three separate factions battled against the Vietnamese-backed State of Cambodia (SOC). The strongest of these factions, the Khmer Rouge, continued to operate out of jungle bases with Chinese and Thai backing. The *Front Uni pour un Cambodge Independent, Neutre, Pacifique et Cooperatif* (FUNCINPEC) was loyal to Sihanouk and received support from France. The last faction, the Khmer People’s National Liberation Front (KPNLF), was a right-wing group that received humanitarian aid and training, but allegedly no weapons, from the United States.⁷

In 1982, with the backing of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the Khmer Rouge, FUNCINPEC and the KPNLF formed a coalition government in exile that was led by Sihanouk. The Khmer Rouge leader, Khieu Samphan, was installed as vice-president. This coalition continued to direct guerrilla activities against the SOC which, by 1987, began to

weaken as Vietnam started to pull troops out of Cambodia. At the same time, the major external players – the United States, China, the Soviet Union, Thailand and France – began to reassess their respective commitments in Cambodia, deciding to put in place a framework for the settlement of the conflict. It was clear by this point that “[a]fter the Middle East, the Cambodian conflict was possibly the most complex single diplomatic problem in the world to try and resolve.”⁸

Internationally, the late 1980s signalled the beginning of the end of the Cold War. The rise of the Gorbachev government in the Soviet Union heralded a hitherto unprecedented level of cooperation between the superpowers, fuelling open dialogue in areas ranging from arms control to regional interests. The success of the United Nations Transitional Authority Group (UNTAG) in Namibia, although not directly attributed to this thaw in relations,⁹ gave cause to many to believe that the UN could play a greater and more influential role in conflict resolution. With the collapse of the Soviet Bloc in 1990, this feeling of collective international optimism was accelerated. It was widely believed at the time that the UN could take a more active and aggressive stance in sensitive areas that were previously avoided due to fears of superpower confrontation. Against this backdrop of heightened UN relevancy and potency, discussions with regard to a lasting peace in Cambodia began to take shape.

The ensuing diplomatic negotiations, collectively known as the Cambodian Settlement Agreements,¹⁰ are worthy of study in themselves, but will not be dealt with in detail in this paper. Suffice it to say, the 23 October 1991 Agreements spelled out the need for the establishment of a new Cambodian government, a fixed period of 18 months in which this was to occur, and the rehabilitation and reconstruction of Cambodia. All this was to be overseen by a supervisory body known as the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC), which was, in

effect, charged with the “supreme authority to exercise control over all aspects of the comprehensive political settlement of the conflict.”¹¹ Given a breathtakingly ambitious mandate, UNTAC was assigned responsibility for something that the United Nations had never undertaken on such a large scale¹² – the task to become “a kind of quasi-governor-in-trust of an entire sovereign country.”¹³ Immediately following the 23 October 1991 Agreements, the UN authorized the deployment of forces under the auspices of the United Nations Advance Mission in Cambodia (UNAMIC). UNAMIC became operational on 9 November 1991, and consisted of a small military and civil liaison staff, logistics elements and a mine clearance training unit.¹⁴

The UNTAC Mandate

Specifically, Annex 1 of the Cambodian Settlement Agreements outlined UNTAC’s mandate in detail. This annex began with an overview of the task at hand, stipulating that an SRSG would be appointed to direct and oversee the settlement. The SRSG had unprecedented powers of veto over an interim coalition government formed from the four warring factions and headed by Sihanouk. Annex 1 went on to enunciate the major requirements of UNTAC that were ultimately addressed through the establishment of seven distinct components, each reporting to the SRSG. Truly multidimensional in character, UNTAC and its components – **electoral, repatriation, rehabilitation, human rights, civil administration, civilian police and military** – was officially established on 15 March 1992; UNAMIC was absorbed in the process. Structurally, the Military Component Commander reported directly to the SRSG, while the other component heads reported to the Deputy SRSG who in turn reported to the SRSG.

A democratically conducted election was key to the stability of the country and “thus became, for better or worse, the *sine qua non* of the resolution of the Cambodian conflict.”¹⁵

Accordingly, the **Electoral Component's** objective was to create conditions that would encourage the maximum number of Cambodians over the age of 18 to vote. Because of its importance, all other functions of UNTAC were subordinated to the conduct of free and fair elections. The Electoral Component of the mission was headed by a Chief Electoral Officer, Dr. Reginald Austin, who had previously supervised the elections in Namibia. He was responsible for developing a registration system, a method to ensure secret ballots, and ensuring that the basic human rights associated with an election, such as freedom of speech and assembly, were present. On 12 August 1992, an electoral law was enacted that defined the qualifications of a voter and stated that the election would be held early in 1993. UNTAC's Electoral Component suffered a number of setbacks, principally a refusal of the Khmer Rouge to cooperate, and the occasional Khmer Rouge slaying of civilian electoral workers. Nevertheless, an election was held between 23 and 28 May 1993. Despite dire predictions, nearly ninety percent of eligible voters cast their ballots. Even in one location held by the Khmer Rouge, "where voters were shelled and killed on their way to the polling sites, the turnout was about 80 percent."¹⁶

The **Repatriation Component** of UNTAC was closely linked to the election by virtue of the fact that the majority of the 370,000 refugees, constituting almost ten percent of Cambodia's eligible voters, were living in Thai refugee camps along the border. Responsible for the screening, transport, assistance and reintegration of the refugees, the Repatriation Component oversaw this one-year task between April of 1992 and May of 1993. Largely successful, the repatriation was directed by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and thus did not necessarily take its direction from the SRSG or the Deputy SRSG.

After decades of war, infrastructure was virtually non-existent in most parts of Cambodia. The problem was considered so serious, and so vital to the achievement of long-term stability,

that a separate component was established. Despite its importance, the **Rehabilitation Component** was plagued by a shortage of both staff and funds. Some work, such as road construction and demining, was accomplished by the Military Component of the mission. Nevertheless, rehabilitation, which was under the stewardship of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), was marginal during UNTAC's tenure. "Exceptionally poor planning and administrative confusion were part of the problem, but the deeper snags were political: the dilemma of how to rehabilitate in a neutral fashion in the midst of a war."¹⁷

The **Human Rights Component** was almost as small as its rehabilitation counterpart. Human rights abuses were widespread in Cambodia and many citizens had no idea of the concept of basic human rights. Yet the conduct of free and fair elections hinged, *inter alia*, upon an environment of respect for human rights. To accomplish this daunting task, the Human Rights Component embarked upon a program of human rights education and was given sweeping powers to investigate human rights abuses. "Radically understaffed and suffering from a constant shortage of vehicles in a mission notorious for its vehicular cornucopia,"¹⁸ the Human Rights Component met with mixed success. Although it did manage to create an awareness of human rights that had hitherto been non-existent, widespread human rights abuses occurred virtually daily. In a bitter twist of irony, the first two individuals arrested by UNTAC for human rights abuses "were held without habeas corpus and without trial."¹⁹

The **Civil Administration Component** was the largest of the non-uniformed elements of UNTAC and clearly had a monumental task. Charged with controlling the Cambodian departments of security, finance, information, defence and foreign affairs, it was envisioned that UN stewardship of these departments would further promote a neutral environment for the conduct of the elections. There were a number of areas of immediate concern, including the

establishment of viable border controls, illegal exports of teak, banditry and the political nature of the Vietnamese-modelled Cambodian defence structure. Slow in deploying, there were only 157 professional international staff in Cambodia by July 1992. By the summer of 1993, a few months before the end of the mission, the UNTAC Civil Administration Component had finally established offices in all 21 provinces and had increased its professional international staff to over 200 of which almost half were located in Phnom Penh.²⁰

The Deputy SRSG's responsibilities also included oversight of the **Civilian Police Component**. While each of the Cambodian factions had their own police force, they were, in reality, extensions of their respective armies. In the general theme of the mission, UN Civilian Police were to supervise and control the work of the existing police forces in order to promote a coercion-free environment prior to the elections. Furthermore, these police were to provide security for returning refugees and to conduct police training to inculcate elementary policing skills and the principles of human rights and basic freedoms. By November of 1992, nearly all of the 3,600 strong police contingent had arrived in theatre.²¹ A potentially influential element of the mission, the Police Component did not attempt to establish any manner of control over the factional police forces. In addition, the task of providing security for returning refugees ultimately fell to the Military Component. Some training of factional police was done, but considerable internal training of the Civilian Police Component had to be accomplished. The SRSG, Yasushi Akashi, noted that "[o]f the 14 countries that sent over 100 police monitors, 13 were from developing countries...[and]...some of the personnel did not meet the highest professional standards."²²

The last element of UNTAC, and by far the largest, was the **Military Component**. Commanded by Lieutenant-General John Sanderson, an Australian, this component was made up

of almost 16,000 personnel. It was charged with a number of major tasks, including: the monitoring and verification of the ceasefire; the verification of the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Cambodian soil; the cantonment, disarmament and demobilization of 70 percent of the warring factions prior to the election; the investigation of military non-compliance with the Peace Agreements; and the institution of a demining program. To undertake this work, the military component operated on a nine-sector basis corresponding, as much as possible, to the provincial boundaries used by the civilian administration. The Military Component Commander had at his disposal 12 infantry battalions, a headquarters, a military observer group, an engineer group, naval and air elements, and support in the form of logistics, medical and signals elements.

The role of the Military Component expanded over time and “[i]n practice, MILCOM [*sic*] pervaded almost every aspect of UNTAC’s mandate.”²³ This was particularly evident during the preparations for the election process where military elements provided security for both returning refugees and election workers. The pervasiveness of the military was also underscored by both the number and complexity of rehabilitation tasks that were assigned to the engineer group; many of these tasks could not be accomplished because some contributing nations had equipped their units for the predicted task of demining and not for more complex construction tasks.

With the completion of elections in May of 1993, there was significant pressure from troop contributing nations, as well as the newly elected government, to adhere to the eighteen-month time limit specified in the Agreements. UNTAC’s mandate ended on 23 September 1993, and by the middle of November of 1993, the Police and Military Components had completed their withdrawals. UNTAC had cost US \$2.8 billion,²⁴ although the UNDP and other UN

agencies incurred additional costs as small numbers of staff and aid workers remained in the country.

Successes and Failures

The exceedingly complex nature of UNTAC leads to the conclusion that it is neither useful nor fair to categorize this intervention, as a whole, as a success or failure. Nevertheless, it is worthwhile examining the state of the country since the termination of UNTAC's mission to determine its legacy. In the area of human rights, progress has been marginal. "Despite UNTAC having introduced the framework for a plural [*sic*] society, the Government of Cambodia after 1993 tended to revert to the authoritarian methods of its constituent parties...[where]...non-acceptance of political opposition"²⁵ was manifested through the execution of journalists and editors. Factional fighting has continued to be a way of life in Cambodia, culminating in a *coup d'état* against the democratically elected government in 1997. It was also evident by this time that the *coup d'état* signalled "the political breakdown of the democratic process that was thought to have been established, at great cost, under the auspices of the UN."²⁶ Nevertheless, the work of a number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) whose birth in Cambodia was facilitated by UNTAC's deployment has continued and, in some cases, grown. While these NGOs have had little impact on the ruling government, they have been gaining momentum with the general population who have, in turn, been able to exert marginal influence on the government. As an example, "[b]y 1998...[the]...systematic torture and shackling of prisoners had stopped...[but] coercion still influenced the judicial process."²⁷

Economically, the outlook for Cambodia is not good. There is some scope for tourism revenue, but the market is small given the potential dangers and instability. A recent article in

Asiaweek described Pailin, a former Khmer Rouge stronghold, as “a jungle Vegas...[where]... having abolished money and murdered one-fifth of Cambodia’s peasants for being ‘too bourgeois,’ the old Cadres have finally decided that if you can’t beat up capitalists you might as well join them.”²⁸ Such enterprises, even if successful, will not benefit Cambodia as a whole. Even more alarming is the drop in foreign investment projects, which “have slumped dramatically from \$41 million in 1999 to \$4 million in 2000.”²⁹ Rehabilitation, one of UNTAC’s greatest weaknesses, seems to be coming to a virtual standstill. Clearly, the economic outlook for Cambodia, nearly a decade after UNTAC, is bleak.

UNTAC did have some notable successes. Regardless of the current state of democracy in Cambodia, the elections of 1993 were ultimately successful. This can be attributed, in no small way, to the amount of advance planning that was inherent in this particular aspect of the mission. As previously mentioned, the Chief Electoral Officer was not only a world expert in the field, but an expert who had previously put theory into practice in Namibia. His involvement from the beginning ensured continuity of effort and focus that was not apparent in many other aspects of the mission. While other components were still in the early stages of the planning, the Electoral Component had already deployed with UNAMIC to begin the daunting task of enumerating eligible voters.³⁰

On a more basic level, the deployment of UNTAC signalled the end of overt colonialism and foreign intervention in Cambodia. Dominated by the French and Japanese prior to 1954, Cambodians then faced outside pressures from China, Vietnam and the United States, and to a lesser degree from Thailand and the Soviet Union. The end of the Cold War signalled a fatigue with the proxy war that major world powers were waging in Cambodia through the factions, and

UNTAC provided an opportunity for all involved to achieve a clean break and be diplomatically recognized for doing so.

The repatriation of the refugees from the camps in Thailand was probably UNTAC's greatest success. The UNHCR, with UNTAC's aid, repatriated 362,000 refugees on a voluntary basis; 22,000 refugees chose to return on their own. Thailand also repatriated a small number of refugees prior to closing the camps along its borders that had existed, in some cases, for almost two decades. In addition to transportation, refugees received a resettlement package and some received land. Approximately half of the refugees did not return to their place of origin, but to the fertile area of the Battambang region northwest of Phnom Penh.³¹

What has caused Cambodia to slide backwards after the aforementioned successes and its flirtation with democracy? The answer to this question is multi-faceted, but it is clear that UNTAC made some monumental mistakes that may well have impacted on the long-term stability of the country. Perhaps the first problem was created by the timelines of the mission itself. In this regard, “[t]here was a major screw-up in...[the]...whole process – and that...[was]... UNAMIC.”³² It is now widely accepted that a deployment in force shortly after the Cambodian Settlement Agreements would have made a significant impact on the willingness of the factions, in particular the Khmer Rouge, to cooperate. Plagued with administrative bureaucracy, concerns over Croatia and budgetary debates, the UN was slow to implement its plans. UNAMIC was too small to accomplish more than basic fact finding, and “UNTAC suffered a large decrease in authority in early 1992 as time passed and expectations of the factions and the Cambodian people were disappointed.”³³ The SRSG, Yasushi Akashi, and the Military Component Commander did not arrive in Phnom Penh until 15 March 1992 - a full five months after the signing of the Agreements. The twelve infantry battalions were not deployed

until June 1992, and only 20 percent of UNTAC's administrative staff were in place by the same time. In effect, UNTAC was not operational until late August 1992.³⁴

The primary *raison d'être* of the Military Component of UNTAC was the achievement of a ceasefire, and the cantonment and disarmament of the factions. If the Military Component is to be judged by this simple yardstick alone, it failed miserably. The turning point came in June of 1992 when the Khmer Rouge refused to cease operations and refused to disarm, stating that UNTAC had failed to control SOC forces. Prior to this time, the Khmer Rouge had systematically increased its control over large areas of the countryside as the other factions disarmed. Fearing for their own existence and having no faith in UNTAC to stop the Khmer Rouge, the other factions then refused to further canton and surrender their weapons. Those who already had done so were sent on so-called agricultural leave. Had the Khmer Rouge cooperated, there is considerable doubt as to whether cantonment and disarmament would have been possible. The Deputy Military Component Commander, General Loridon, was quoted as saying that "even had they [Khmer Rouge] agreed to disarm, we would have had major problems in carrying out the operation because it had been so badly prepared at the technical and psychological level."³⁵

The failure of the Military Component to control the factions received considerable international condemnation, particularly in view of the fact that the Cambodian Settlement Agreements authorized UNTAC to use "necessary means" to achieve its mandate. Despite the fact that both Akashi and Sanderson were once held hostage, and were later barred from entering the gem-producing, Khmer Rouge-controlled stronghold of Pailin, they were reluctant to use force. The uncooperative stance of the Khmer Rouge produced, in effect, a no-win situation for the Military Component and for UNTAC as a whole. Sanderson was strongly opposed to the use

of force, emphasizing that “UNTAC was a diplomatic mission with a military component, not a military mission with a diplomatic component.”³⁶ There is little question that offensive operations by UNTAC would have proven costly and that Security Council consensus would have been threatened. This, in turn, would have resulted in the withdrawal of some contingents, particularly the Japanese who were participating in their first UN mission but financing a disproportionately large portion of UNTAC. Furthermore, the Military Component did not possess the right force structure, training or attitude to take on the Khmer Rouge, an organization that had successfully resisted the mighty Vietnamese Army for ten years.

On an equal footing with the inability of the Military Component to control the factions was the inadequacy of the Civil Administration Component to effectively establish and maintain control over the five major governmental departments. Financially, UNTAC was unable to separate SOC finances from the campaign funds of its parent political party, the Cambodian People’s Party. This resulted in government funds and mechanisms being overtly used to support the election campaign of the party in power. With regard to foreign affairs, UNTAC was able to re-establish a reasonably sound system of passports and visas, but was powerless to stop the real international problems that were plaguing Cambodia, specifically the smuggling of timber and gems, and the corruption that was endemic throughout the foreign affairs department. It had a similar track record in the Ministry of Defence, being able to exert only marginal control over the activities of the ruling SOC faction. In the realm of public security, UNTAC was also unable to control the interior ministry, police forces or court system, choosing instead to concentrate on education when it was clear that the mandate was unachievable. The last branch of the civil administration, the information department, was at the whim of the four factions to distribute election-related information. In general, “[t]he State of Cambodia simply administered

around UNTAC.”³⁷ Concealed parallel structures emerged where “the actual chain of policy bypassed UNTAC, whose officer was kept busy watching an official without function while the real decisions were made elsewhere, out of UNTAC’s sight.”³⁸

The problems of the Civil Administration Component in controlling governmental functions were symptomatic of larger issues within the UNTAC structure. Little effort was made to recruit UN civilians trained in their respective disciplines, and surprisingly even less attention was paid to finding sufficient personnel and translators who had at least a basic knowledge of the Khmer language. Within each of the provinces, the chief UNTAC civil administrator had virtually no control over the functions of staff because the staff reported to their respective discipline heads in Phnom Penh. This lack of internal control and communication was exacerbated by the activities of UN agencies, such as the UNHCR and the UNDP, who often conducted their business external to the UNTAC structure. Further compounding the issue was an acute shortage of personnel brought about by unrealistic and tardy planning. The magnitude of the problem was underscored by “the Australian proposal for UNTAC that estimated effective control of civil administration would require not 500 but a staff of 500,000.”³⁹

Many of the problems experienced by the Civil Administration Component were a result of the background and quality of personnel provided by contributing nations, a problem that was common to all UNTAC Components. The Military Component Commander found that cooperation between UNTAC components was lacking, and later publicly lamented that “[s]ome [UN civilians], particularly those coming straight out of academia,... [had]... a positive aversion to the military.”⁴⁰ Nowhere was the problem of quality more evident than in the Police Component, who received the bulk of their officers from so-called developing nations where the knowledge of the functions and roles played by civil police in a democratic society was lacking.

There is sufficient anecdotal evidence of UN military vehicles being stopped at former factional checkpoints by UNTAC civilian police in the early stages of the mission to lend credence to this observation. More than one UNTAC military transport driver recounted being asked for a passage fee by someone else wearing a blue beret.⁴¹ Similar problems were experienced by at least one of the Military Component's infantry battalions, and many civilian members of UNTAC could speak neither of the two working languages of the mission – English and French – and could not drive. This lack of adequate screening placed a significant burden on both the SRSG and the component commanders, as a considerable amount of UNTAC's precious time and energy had to be spent on the training of itself, not the Cambodian elements it was designed to oversee. This was not lost on the general population, causing Prince Sihanouk to remark, in his typically scathing way, that UNTAC was “a hideous comedy,...a terrible cocktail of races...who cannot even agree with each other.”⁴²

Disunity was apparent at all levels of UNTAC, and was highlighted by the resignation of General Loridon, the French Deputy Military Component Commander. As the Commander of UNAMIC, Loridon was one of the first UN officers in Cambodia. When Sanderson arrived on 15 March 1992, Loridon reverted to the position of Deputy Commander of UNTAC. Highly respected by all four factions, he was nonetheless critical of UNTAC's handling of the intransigence of the Khmer Rouge. On 29 July 1992, he was replaced by another French officer, General Rideau. Loridon's departure from Cambodia was a significant blow to UNTAC because a key personality in the direction of the mission, from its inception, was lost.⁴³

The fact that the elections were held and the majority of eligible Cambodians voted is, as previously mentioned, one of the successes of UNTAC. Nevertheless, it is worth examining the conditions under which these elections were held. The elections were to be conducted only if

they were “free and fair,” conditions defined by the inability of the ruling SOC to influence the outcome, freedom from intimidation and violence, and the actual technical conduct of the election. When Akashi made the decision to move ahead with the elections, there was doubt as to whether any of these conditions could be satisfied. In the end, the technical conduct of the election was sound, but the elections were not, by any stretch of the imagination, “free and fair.” The SOC, like the other factions, exerted great influence in areas that it controlled, and “the whole registration/campaign period...witnessed a high degree of violence, murders, intimidation and coercion.”⁴⁴ Even the Deputy Chief Electoral Officer, a Canadian, conceded that voter intimidation was widespread.⁴⁵

UNTAC’s major problems can be attributed to an unwillingness by the factions to cooperate, despite the fact that they had signalled their intention to do so by signing the Cambodian Settlement Agreements. In this respect, the question of “ripeness”⁴⁶ arises. Although it was evident that there was international fatigue with the Cambodian conflict and that superpowers were quickly losing interest in the struggle, this was not necessarily true of the factions themselves who were pressured into a peace. Least ripe for conflict settlement were the Khmer Rouge, who had little incentive to commit to a democratic election which they had little chance of winning. The tenacity of the Khmer Rouge was further fuelled by economic interests. Their “highly profitable log and gem trade for weapons and other necessities with the Thai military made...[them]... financially better off than other factions and thus...UN economic aid was less attractive.”⁴⁷

Perhaps UNTAC’s greatest failing was in the scope and intent of the mandate. The concept of multidimensionality can be a two-edged sword. On one hand, the pursuit of peacebuilding in several distinct areas can allow for individual successes even when other

aspects of a mission fail. On the other hand, there is the danger of spreading finite resources too thinly, thus precipitating marginal results across the entire mission. UNTAC was certainly confronted with a lack of qualified personnel and funds, marginalizing its ability to take on the task of steering an entire country towards democracy in a mere 18 months. Nevertheless, regardless of its own shortcomings, UNTAC's mandate was rendered unachievable shortly after UNTAC deployed by virtue of the fact that Khmer Rouge refused to cooperate. This lack of cooperation was based, not entirely without justification, on the assertion that UNTAC was unable to exert any manner of control over the Vietnamese-installed SOC government. Although it is speculation as to whether or not the Khmer Rouge would have cooperated in any case, the root causes of UNTAC's failure to control the SOC were anchored in its inability to fully undertake the obligations agreed to in the mandate. The mandate was idealistic and unachievable, stemming from a "mood of post-Cold War optimism...[fuelled by a desire]...to give the Cambodian people instant access to democratic values and institutions, and a genuinely free choice of government – to create overnight a sort of little Asian Switzerland."⁴⁸ It is now evident, in hindsight, that more time should have been spent matching means to ends in the planning stage, and that key mission personnel, including the SRSG and component commanders, should have been involved from the beginning.

Lessons Learned

The UN intervention in Cambodia was a watershed event in the evolution of post-Cold War peacekeeping. It was the largest and most complex UN operation at the time, and provided fertile ground to derive lessons and techniques applicable to future missions. One of the most significant lessons learned in this regard was the need to maintain absolute impartiality, at the operational authority

level, in the execution of the mandate. While it may be possible to bring sanctions and diplomatic initiatives to bear at the international level, a lack of impartiality in the conduct of the mission – either real or perceived – will hinder the achievement of the mandate. Although not intentional, UNTAC could not claim to be impartial. From the beginning of the mission, UNTAC’s inability to control the Khmer Rouge resulted in a double standard that ultimately left the other three factions unwilling to cooperate. On a more subtle level, the “presence of UNTAC, moreover, distorted the economy in favour of the cities and may have exacerbated ethnic tensions by seeming to benefit immigrant Vietnamese, who were greatly distrusted”⁴⁹ by the Khmer Rouge, FUNCINPEC, and the KPNLF. For its part, the SOC government believed that it was unfairly scrutinized by virtue of the fact that UNTAC’s “operation and its personnel were too often confined to the capital city of Phnom Penh.”⁵⁰

Planning and coordination during the lead up to and the conduct of UNTAC’s mission was questionable. This lacuna not only caused the credibility problems associated with the delay in implementing the Cambodian Settlement Agreements, but also limited UNTAC’s effectiveness when it did deploy. The need for the early involvement and continuity of key operational authorities – namely the SRSG and component commanders – has already been discussed. In UNTAC’s case, the major actors who were charged with implementing the mission had little or no involvement in formulating the mandate and matching means to ends. This interaction between the UN Secretariat and the operational authorities was virtually non-existent, and “UNTAC planning seemed at times to have suffered from a dialogue of the deaf.”⁵¹ Furthermore, no provisions were made in the planning to account for the “Clausewitzian” friction produced by the non-compliance of one or more of the factions.

During the implementation of UNTAC, the mission was fragmented not only because of a lack of unity of authority, but often a lack of unity of purpose as well. This was most evident

in the civilian components that often approached problems and issues with different priorities based upon guidance and direction assigned by different UN agencies such as the UNCHR and the UNDP. The result was an overly centralized and bureaucratic mission in which major, time-sensitive decisions had to be referred to Phnom Penh, and sometimes New York, for resolution. In many cases, factional compliance had long since evaporated by the time a decision reached the field.⁵² In effect, provincial UN administrators were powerless to direct a unified and coherent approach to UNTAC's civil mandate. It is clear that future missions of this nature require greater internal coordination to achieve at least unity of purpose if not unity of authority. In UNTAC's case, simple measures such as the exchange of greater numbers of competent liaison officers amongst the various components would have gone far in bridging many of the cultural, organizational and priority related issues.

The Military Component of UNTAC was not immune to planning deficiencies, particularly in the realm of restrictions regarding employment. While it must be accepted in modern peace support operations that contributing nations will place restrictions on troop employment, these restrictions need to be known up front. The military planners of UNTAC were continually frustrated by hitherto unknown restrictions placed on various national contingents. In one case, plans for the deployment of the infantry battalions had to be altered from a plan based on capabilities and needs to a plan based on national restrictions regarding employment and risk. In another case, several nations directed that their troops were not to be involved in any aspect of the electoral process. In the end, more than 40 percent of UNTAC's Military Component could not be employed in a flexible manner because of national limitations imposed during or after the completion of mission plans.⁵³

Notwithstanding national restrictions on employment, the common operating procedures and culture shared by the various military contingents did present an opportunity for flexibility that was seldom present in other mission components. UNTAC's ability to shift the military focus from one of cantonment and disarmament to one of logistics support to the electoral process is an example of a relatively rapid change in mandate that allowed the elections to be held. In essence, the Military Component acted as a backstop for several of the other components who were originally mandated to undertake all aspects of the election process, but were ill equipped to deal with the complexities of the associated logistics. This flexibility is an important planning consideration for future missions, and highlights not only the need for operational authorities to plan for contingencies, but to seek approval for these contingencies from troop-contributing nations early in the planning process.

UNTAC underscored the need to reconsider the concepts of timelines and endstates, and how they are implemented and assessed at the mission level. The endstate of a democratic government elected through "free and fair" elections was unrealistic in itself, but the accomplishment of this goal in 18 months made the mandate impossible. Because of international lobbying from contributing nations, there was considerable pressure on the SRS and his component commanders to accomplish the mission within the specified timelines. Although Akashi took a calculated gamble and decided to proceed with the elections, there may have been greater lasting benefit in waiting to ensure that the conditions were truly 'free and fair.' In hindsight, the idea of simply holding the elections and getting out should have been subordinated to the idea of not only an elected government, but one which was favourably equipped to move forward on a democratic course. Akashi's assertion that UNTAC "brought

about a fundamental change from a one-party, communist-style, authoritarian regime to a liberal democracy based on pluralism and freedom of choice”⁵⁴ was premature and overly optimistic.

Lastly, the UN intervention in Cambodia highlighted the need for mission operational authorities to develop and facilitate the work of NGOs, all under the umbrella of central coordinating agencies such as the UNHCR and the UNDP. While individual agendas and reasons for involvement are as numerous as the NGOs themselves, and NGOs can often create undesirable dependencies, they are, nonetheless, vital to the development of war-torn countries. One of the successful legacies of UNTAC is the continued existence and, in some cases, growth of NGOs throughout the country. Although these organizations have had marginal influence with Cambodia’s ruling governments, they have been successful in a number of significant rehabilitation projects, and have the support of a considerable portion of the population. Once a suitable endstate has been achieved and a mission is terminated, the coordinated efforts of NGOs can often significantly influence the long-term stability of the country and its prospect for lasting peace.

Conclusion

The fate of Cambodia remains uncertain. Little progress has been made in the areas of personal safety, law and order, human rights, and economic development. Nevertheless, a number of NGOs have taken root in the country and may, over time, be able to exert some influence. The relatively slow progress in the country as a whole underscores that fact that although UNTAC had some triumphs, it “did not succeed in instantly transplanting Western-style pluralistic democracy into Cambodia.”⁵⁵ The reasons for this are legion, but many stem from the flawed planning and unrealistic mandate of the mission. Failure to include the

operational authorities who were charged to conduct the mission in the initial planning was certainly a major factor in UNTAC's unrealistic goals, delay in deployment and its disjointed execution. Perhaps as a result, there was no coherent campaign plan, and thus no overarching plan on which each of the components of UNTAC could base their detailed plans. Equally detrimental were the problems associated with the quality and training of UNTAC personnel, an issue that caused many Cambodians to lose faith in UNTAC and its work.

Putting the discussion of UNTAC's strengths and weaknesses aside, the issue of the relevancy of the mission needs to be raised. With a few minor exceptions, the deployment of UNTAC marked the end of foreign intervention and foreign aid to the warring factions. Nevertheless, the argument could be made that with the end of the Cold War, this denouement was already in the process of occurring. The fact that major international players with a stake in Cambodia were willing to broker a peace in that country underscored a fatigue and lack of support for continued fighting. In essence, conflict termination –from an international point of view – may have already been inevitable. What was not inevitable, however, was termination of the intra-state conflict. Few, if any of the factions were truly ripe to move towards peace. Unfortunately UNTAC, through its unwitting bias, may well have exacerbated the problem by disillusioning many factional leaders who were in a position to lead their respective organizations in reconciliation.

Perhaps the greatest tragedy of UNTAC was the failure of its leadership, both civilian and military, to fully understand and articulate the basic cultural and historical precepts of the country that it was charged to oversee. This failing permeated every aspect of the mission and had far-reaching consequences. UNTAC's propensity to centralize both decision-making and resources in Phnom Penh ran counter to centuries of history. Not since the fall of the Angkor

civilization in the 14th century had power been concentrated in one place, and the experiences of both the French and Japanese in Cambodia further highlighted the fact that significant resources had to be dispersed throughout the country to effectively administer it. As one UN observer belatedly observed, “[n]o one in Phnom Penh ever decided the fate of Cambodia.”⁵⁶

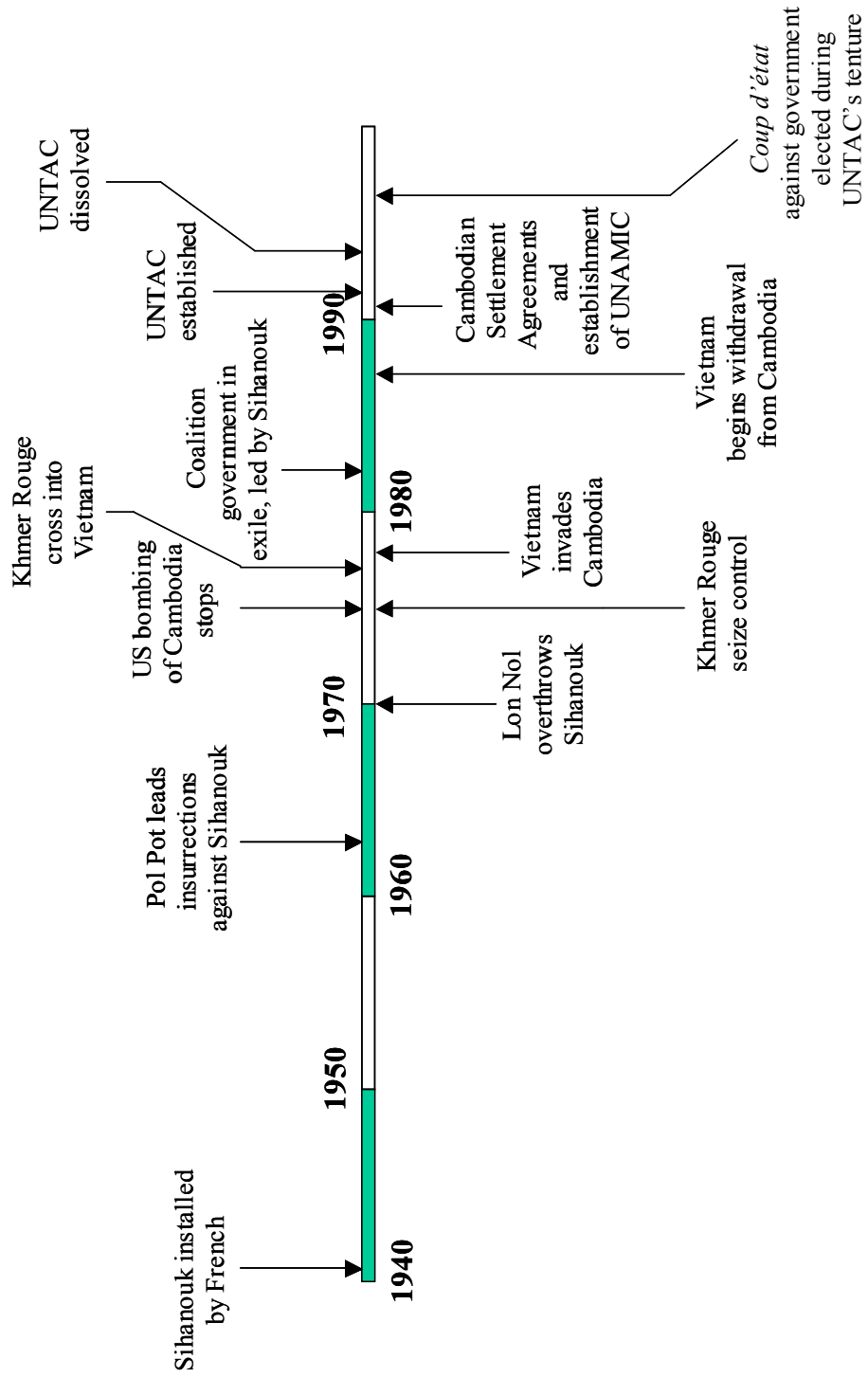
In a similar vein, UNTAC’s operational authorities did not exploit the reverence that a large number of Cambodians felt towards authority. Pre-colonial Cambodia was governed by a *mandala* – a circle of counsellors and advisors. At the centre of this group was the *devarja*, a god-king whose origins were found in the Angkorian empire, which in itself represented the height of Cambodian civilization.⁵⁷ Cambodians rallied around Angkorian history as a distant source of national pride, and the concept of the “political *mandala* [author’s italics], and elements of it continues to be found in attitudes towards the royalty and towards other power-holders.”⁵⁸ Mercurial and often irrational, Prince Sihanouk was, nevertheless, the embodiment of Cambodian royalty. There can be no doubt that his bitter and public denunciation of UNTAC influenced the opinion of a large number of Cambodians.

Was UNTAC “a \$3 billion boondoggle”?⁵⁹ The current state of affairs in Cambodia would suggest that UNTAC had a marginal influence on the long-term stability of the country. Nevertheless, it is debatable whether or not UNTAC would have had a greater lasting impact had the mission been conducted as originally envisioned in the mandate. There are already indications that the UN has learned from some of the mistakes that were made during the 1991-1993 period, particularly in the areas of impartiality, mission planning and the involvement of key personnel in the planning process. In this regard, the UN intervention in Cambodia may ultimately prove to be of more benefit to the UN itself than to the country it was charged to oversee.



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Figure 1: Map of Cambodia⁶⁰



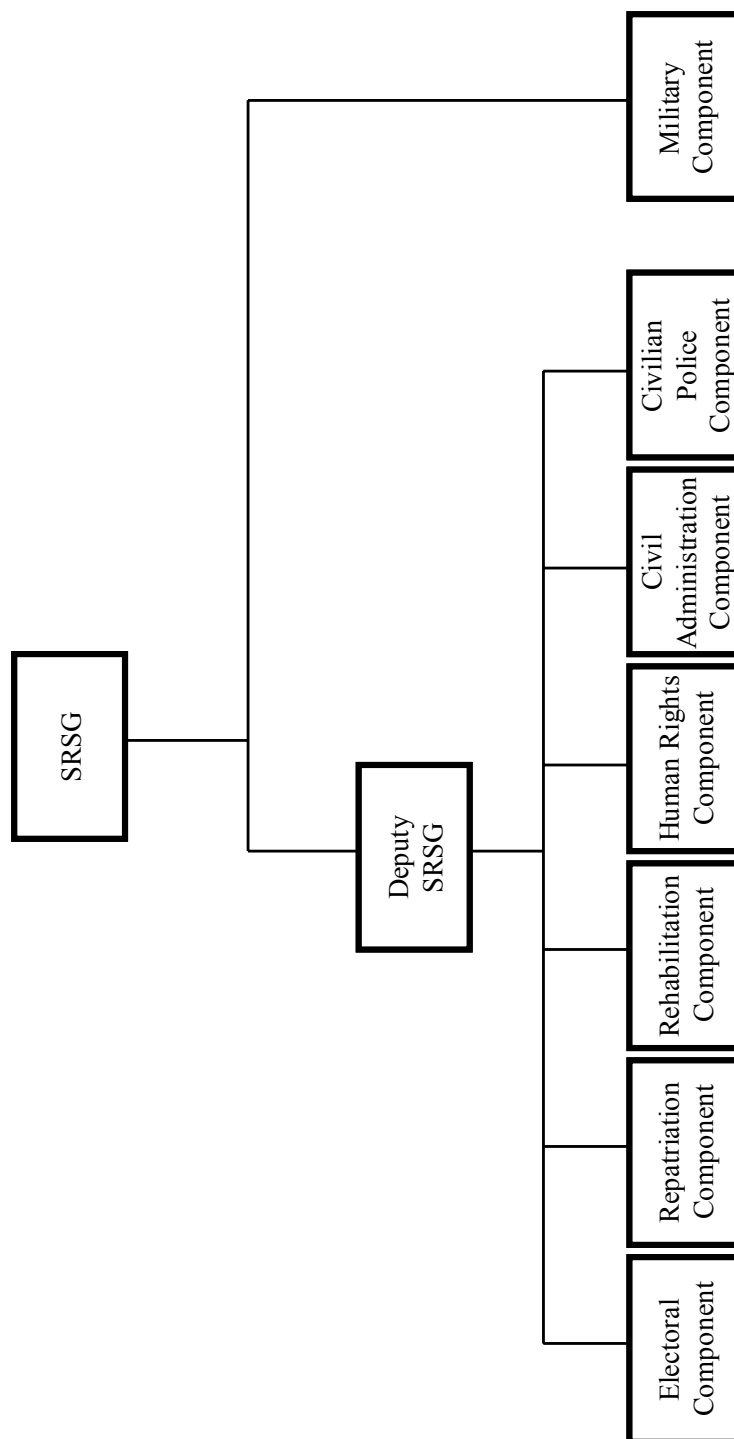


Figure 3: UNTAC Organization

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2. Kalevi J. Holsti, *Peace and War: Armed Conflicts and International Order, 1648-1989* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 353.
3. Hugh Miall, Oliver Ramsbottom and Tom Woodhouse, *Contemporary Conflict Resolution* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), 21.
4. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, *Agenda for Peace* (New York: United Nations, 1992), 11.
5. Fen Osler Hampson, *Nurturing Peace: Why Peace Settlements Succeed or Fail* (Washington: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1996), 174.
6. United States. Hearing before the Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs of the Committee on Foreign Affairs House of Representatives, September 14, 1989. *The Paris Peace Conference on Cambodia: Implications for U.S. Policy* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 17.
7. The American claim that weapons were not supplied to the KPNLF is difficult to verify. As a Canadian officer serving with UNTAC, the author saw numerous American manufactured mines; these may have been supplied through third parties.
8. Gareth Evans. Presentation to the Peacekeeping Seminar at the Australian Defence Force Academy by Senator the Honourable Gareth Evans, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Canberra, 2 May 1994. "The Comprehensive Political Settlement to the Cambodian Conflict: An Exercise in Cooperating for Peace." *News Release* (Canberra: 1994), 1.
9. Hampson, 64.
10. The Cambodian Settlement Agreements are also known as the Paris Peace Accords and, more formally, as The Agreements on a Comprehensive Political Settlement of the Cambodian Conflict. In addition to the Supreme National Council of Cambodia, which represented all four internal factions, the document was signed by 17 countries that had interests, to varying degrees, in a Cambodian settlement. In addition to the State of Cambodia (SOC), these countries included Australia, Brunei, Canada, the People's Republic of China, France, India, Indonesia, Japan, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, the USSR, the UK, the US and Vietnam.
11. Carlyle A. Thayer, "The United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia: The Restoration of Sovereignty," Tom Woodhouse, Robert Bruce and Macolm Dando, ed., *Peacekeeping and Peacemaking: Towards Effective Intervention in Post-Cold War Conflicts* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1998), 151.

12. Trevor Findlay, *Conflict Resolution and Peacekeeping in the Post-Cold War Era: Implications for Regional Security* (Canberra: The Australian National University, 1992). 7. Although UNTAC was by far the largest UN mission of this nature, it was not the first. The United Nations Temporary Executive Authority (UNTEA) administered West Irian (West New Guinea) in 1962-63.
13. Jarat

26. Gérard Hervouët, "Cambodia: Foreign Policy and Missions for Peace," Gregory Wirick and Robert Miller, ed. *Canada and Missions for Peace: Lessons from Nicaragua, Cambodia and Somalia* (Ottawa: International Development Research Centre, 1998), 76.
27. Downie and Kingsbury, 51.
28. "Travel Log: Local Lore – Pailin, Cambodia's Jungle Vegas," *Asiaweek*, 17 August 2001, 1.
29. Bertil Lintner, "Kicking the Habit," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, Volume 164, No. 30 (2 August 2001), 52.
30. Doyle, 53.
31. United Nations High Commission for Refugees, *The State of the World's Refugees: The Challenge of Protection 1993* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Publishers, 1993), 104-105.
32. Nate Payer, "Unsettled Land," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, Volume 155, Number 8 (27 February 1992), 23.
33. Brian Williams, "R, 17 August

43. Raoul M. Jennar, *Chroniques Cambodgiennes 1990-1994: Rapports au Forum International des ONG au Cambodge* (Paris: Éditions L'Harmattan, 1995), 220.
44. Wang, 23.
45. Goodspeed, 13. The Deputy Chief Electoral Officer of UNTAC was Judy Thompson, a senior Manitoba Elections Commission official.
46. Chester A. Crocker, Fen Osler Hampson and Paemla Aall, ed., *Hearding Cats: Multiparty Mediation in a Complex World* (Washington: United States Institute of Peace, 1999), 51.
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48. Downie and Kingsbury, 46.
49. Doyle, 50.
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52. Doyle, 40-45.
53. Kim and Metrikas, 129.
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55. Downie and Kingsbury, 52.
56. Chopra, 30.
57. Downie and Kingsbury, 46.
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59. Sheri Prasso, "Cambodia: A \$3 Billion Boondoggle," *The Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, Volume 51, Number 2 (March/April 1995), 36.
60. University of Texas of Austin Library Online (UTOL), *Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection*. http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle_east_and_asia/cambodia_pol_97.jpg (23 October 1991).

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