

Factional Politics and Foreign Policy Choices in Cambodia-Thailand Diplomatic
Relations, 1950-2014

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ABSTRACT (ENGLISH)

“Factional Politics and Foreign Policy Choices in Cambodia-Thailand Diplomatic Relations, 1950-2014”

This dissertation aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of Cambodia-Thailand diplomatic relations over the past six decades, specifically from 1950 to 2014. In addition to empirical discussion, it seeks to explain why Cambodian-Thai relationships have fluctuated and what primary factors caused the shifts during the period discussed. In doing so, it employs the “social conflict” analysis, which views states not as unitary actors, but within which is comprised of different societal forces competing with one another and pursues foreign policies in accordance with their own ideology, interest, and strategy. As such, it is postulated that Cambodia-Thailand diplomatic relations should not be seen simply as relations between two unitary states cooperating with or securitizing against one another, but rather as a matrix of intertwining relationships between various social and political groups in both states harboring competing ideologies and/or interests to advance their power positions at home.

Two inter-related arguments are therefore put forward in this research. Firstly, Cambodian-Thai relations are likely to be cooperative when both governments in power are civilian-democratically elected regimes and share similar ideologies, mutual economic interests, as well as security outlooks. Conversely, relations between them tend to deteriorate when these factors are not reciprocal. This is particularly true when one government has more in common with the dissidents of the government of the other side. Secondly, though antagonistic nationalism does exist between Cambodia and Thailand, it is not a determinant of the two nations’ foreign relations. This research argues that nationalism and historical animosity are invoked only if at least the government on one side needs to bolster its own legitimacy at home, *and* the government on the other side does not share a similar ideology or strategic interests with its own – the second aspect being the more important factor here.

Keywords: factional politics, foreign policy, Cambodian-Thai relations, Preah Vihear, securitization, social conflict

ABSTRACT (DEUTSCH)

Ziel der Dissertation ist es, eine umfassende Analyse der kambodschanisch-thailändischen diplomatischen Beziehungen von 1950 bis 2014 zu liefern. Die Arbeit geht über einen rein historischen Bericht hinaus, da sie darauf abzielt, die Wechselhaftigkeit der kambodschanisch-thailändischen Beziehungen zu erklären. Als Grundlage dient hierzu ein Ansatz sozialen Konflikts, der Staaten nicht als homogene Akteure ansieht, sondern vielmehr als eine Konfiguration konfligierender Kräfte, die ihre außenpolitischen Ziele im Einklang mit ihrer eigenen Ideologie, ihren Interessen und ihren Strategien verfolgen. Daher postuliert die Arbeit, dass die kambodschanisch-thailändischen Beziehungen nicht als Produkt einheitlicher Staaten angesehen werden sollten, die entweder miteinander kooperieren oder sich voneinander abschotten, sondern als Matrix sich überlappender Beziehungen zwischen gesellschaftlichen und politischen Gruppen beider Staaten, die konkurrierende Ideologien und/oder Interessen zur Förderung ihrer innenpolitischen Machtposition beherbergen.

Das Projekt bringt zwei mit einer verknüpfte Argumente hervor. Erstens, kambodschanisch-thailändische Beziehungen sind wahrscheinlich dann kooperativ angelegt, wenn es sich bei beiden Machthabern um zivil-demokratisch gewählte Regierungen mit ähnlichen Ideologien, ökonomischen Interessen und Sicherheitsbedenken handelt. Umgekehrt verschlechtern sich die Beziehungen, wenn diese Faktoren nicht reziprok sind. Dies ist besonders dann der Fall, wenn eine der beiden Regierungen mehr mit der Opposition der anderen gemein hat. Zweitens, auch wenn antagonistische Nationalismen auf beiden Seiten bestehen, handelt es sich keinesfalls um eine Determinante, die die Außenpolitik beider Seiten festlegt. Die Arbeit argumentiert, dass Nationalismen nur dann aufgerufen werden, wenn zumindest eine der beiden Regierungen ihre Legitimität in der Heimat stärken muss und die andere Regierung nicht dieselbe Ideologie und strategischen Interessen teilt.

Keywords: Sekuritisierung, Außenpolitik, kambodschanisch-thailändische Beziehungen, Preah Vihear, sozialer Konflikt

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract (English)	3
Abstract (Deutsch)	4
Acknowledgements	5
List of Tables	13
List of Figures	13
Abbreviations	15
 Chapter 1: Introduction	 17
1.1. Background of the research	17
1.2. Purpose and scope of the research	18
1.3. Literature review on Khmer-Thai relations	20
1.4. Significance of the research	28
1.5. Theoretical framework	29
1.6. Thesis statements	32
1.7. Research methodologies and data collection	33
1.8. Structure of the dissertation	35
 Chapter 2: <i>Sangkum Reastr Niyum</i> Period (1955-1970)	 39
2.1. Introduction	39
2.2. Cambodia and Thailand in World War II	40
2.3. Cambodia and Thailand after World War II	43
2.4. The Royal Crusade of Independence of Norodom Sihanouk	45
2.5. Cambodia's independence and Sihanouk's initial grip of power	48
2.5.1. The case of Preah Vihear temple	50
2.5.2. Prince Sihanouk's "neutrality" and relations with Thailand	54
2.5.3. The "Bangkok Plot"	60
2.6. Post-1962: the prince "turned left"	66
2.7. Conclusion	73
 Chapter 3: Khmer Republic Period (1970-1975)	 77
3.1. Introduction	77
3.2. The March 1970 coup and the civil war in Cambodia	78

	10
3.3. The Khmer Republic's foreign policy outlook	87
3.4. Relations with Thailand (May 1970 – October 1973)	91
3.5. Relations with Thailand (October 1973 – April 1975)	96
3.5.1. The turmoil in the Khmer Republic	97
3.5.2. Discontent in Thailand during the early 1970s	101
3.5.3. The collapse of the Khmer Republic	106
3.6. Conclusion	108
Chapter 4: Democratic Kampuchea Period (1975-1979)	113
4.1. Introduction	113
4.2. Democratic Kampuchea's foreign policy outlook	116
4.3. Relations from April 1975 to October 1976: neutral ties	118
4.3.1. The <i>Mayaguez</i> affair (May 1975)	121
4.3.2. Thailand-China <i>détente</i>	123
4.3.3. DK-Thailand's shared interests (1975-1976)	126
4.3.4. Khmer refugees and armed resistance forces (1975-1976)	128
4.4. Hostile relations between October 1976 and October 1977	133
4.5. Rapprochement between October 1977 and December 1978	138
4.5.1. Normalization with Kriangsak's government	138
4.5.2. DK-Vietnam tensions	143
4.6. Conclusion	148
Chapter 5: The People's Republic of Kampuchea period (1979-1991)	153
5.1. Introduction	153
5.2. The Third Indochina War	154
5.3. Thailand as the "frontline state"	157
5.4. The PRK and its limited choices in foreign policy making	162
5.5. Refugees and border politics	168
5.6. The Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK)	179
5.7. The "K5 Plan"	185
5.8. Hun Sen and <i>perestroika</i>	190
5.9. Changes in Thai domestic politics	192
5.10. Conclusion	199
Chapter 6: Relations in the Post-Cold War Era (1991-2014)	205
6.1. Introduction	205
6.2. Election and the establishment of the Royal Government of Cambodia	207
6.3. Thailand's dual-track diplomacy with Cambodia (1993-1998)	209
6.3.1. The Khmer Rouge factor	210
6.3.2. Cambodian-Thai economic relations (1992-2003)	216
6.4. The Cambodian political fallout (July 1997)	220
6.5. The rise of Thaksin and Thai foreign policy toward Cambodia	225

6.6. The politics of the 2003 anti-Thai riots	230
6.7. Restoring good-neighbors' relations (2003-2008)	235
6.8. The hostage of Thai domestic politics (2008-2014)	238
6.9. Conclusion	250
Chapter 7: Conclusion	257
7.1. An overview of Cambodia-Thailand diplomatic relations since 1950	257
7.2. Implications for future relations	272
List of Appendices	274
Appendix 1	275
Appendix 2	279
Appendix 3	281
Appendix 4	283
Appendix 5	285
References	287

LIST OF TABLES

Page

Table 1: Recognition of Democratic Kampuchea at the UN General Assembly	184
Table 2: Tourist Arrivals to Cambodia (2008-2012)	245

LIST OF FIGURES

Page

Figure 1: Encampments along the Thai-Kampuchean Border.....	172
Figure 2: Location of Border Camps 1979 – 1989	187

ABBREVIATIONS

ACMECS	Ayeyawady–Chao Phraya–Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy
ANS	Sihanoukist National Army
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CGDK	Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CPK	Communist Party of Kampuchea
CPT	Communist Party of Thailand
DK	Democratic Kampuchea
FANK	Khmer Republic's Armed Forces
FEER	Far Eastern Economic Review
FUNCINPEC	United National Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful, and Cooperative Cambodia
FUNK	National United Front of Kampuchea
KUFNS	Kampuchean United Front for National Salvation
GRUNK	Royal Government of National Union of Kampuchea
ICJ	International Court of Justice
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
JBC	Joint Border Commission
JIM	Jakarta Informal Meetings
KPNLAF	Khmer People's National Liberation Armed Forces
KPNLF	Khmer People's National Liberation Front
KR	Khmer Rouge
NADK	National Army of Democratic Kampuchea
NLF	National Liberation Front
PAD	People's Alliance for Democracy
PAVN	People's Army of Vietnam
PRC	People's Republic of China
PRK	People's Republic of Kampuchea
PRPK	People's Revolutionary Party of Kampuchea
RGC	Royal Government of Cambodia
SNC	Supreme National Council
SOC	State of Cambodia
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNTAC	United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Background of the research

Following the decline of the Khmer Empire sometime in the 15th century, Cambodia experienced continuous internal dynastic power struggles that went hand in hand with the emergence of more powerful neighbors, namely Siam (Thailand) and Dai Viet (Vietnam). The influences of both countries have continued to shape Cambodia's foreign relations during the Cold War period and beyond. Yet, while Cambodia has for the most part enjoyed domestic and regional stability during the last decade, the heated border conflicts between Cambodia and Thailand between 2008 and 2011 have created a strain in the relationship between the two countries, which have dominated local and international media coverage.

In early July 2008, Cambodia successfully enlisted the Preah Vihear temple near the Thai border as a World Heritage Site. While Cambodia celebrated the inscription with national pride, Thailand subsequently regarded it as a danger to her national sovereignty, insisting that Thailand also had a claim to the temple and its vicinity areas. Later that same month, Thai troops occupied the temple and, eventually, a few other temples along the disputed border, which lead to deadly clashes between the two countries from 2008 to 2011. Relations between Cambodia and Thailand were at their lowest during this period.

In fact, Cambodia's diplomatic problems with Thailand are not a recent phenomenon. The recent Preah Vihear conflict resembled similar clashes between the two nations during the 1950s and 1960s. Meanwhile, Cambodia has also experienced many regime changes since independence from France in 1953: from a constitutional monarchy to a republic, from an extremist communist state to a foreign-backed socialist republic during the Cold War era, and again to a constitutional monarchy at present. Thailand, on the other hand, had been ruled by alternations of military and civilian-democratic governments for the past seven decades. Since 1932, Thailand has experienced some 18 military coups (though some were unsuccessful). Consequently, diplomatic relations between Cambodia and Thailand as neighboring countries have neither been uniformly amicable nor strenuous, but have undergone a series of fluctuations during the past six decades. The fact that the two nations have been amicable toward one another since July 2011 (after tensions between 2008 and 2011) reflects a long history of the ebbs and flows of the relationship between them.

1.2. Purpose and scope of the research

When the Preah Vihear conflict broke out in late 2008, politicians, legal experts and scholars have weighed in their opinions and arguments regarding the issue.¹ Cambodia-Thailand relations became a hot topic for academic discussion and research. However, as will be discussed in more detail in the literature review section,

¹ See, for example, Poowin Bunyavejchewin, "Thai-Cambodian Boundary Conflict over Preah Vihear: A Regional Security Complex Analysis" (M.A. thesis, University of Hull, 2009). For legal arguments, see Bora Touch, "Who Owns the Preah Vihear Temple? A Cambodian Position," *Journal of East Asia and International Law*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (Spring 2009): pp. 205-227; and Monthicha Pakdeekong, "Who Owns the Preah Vihear Temple? A Thai Position," *Journal of East Asia and International Law*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (Spring 2009): pp. 229-237.

these research inquiries and academic works focused mainly on the Preah Vihear issue only (with historical references dating back to the French colonial period and the earlier clashes in the late 1950s and 1960s). The majority of these analyses are empirically selective and inevitably project Cambodia-Thailand relations as being historically antagonistic. The period between the 1970s and 1990s has been largely ignored.

What factors have contributed to continuity and changes in Cambodia-Thailand relations during the past sixty years? This research primarily aims to offer a comprehensive and systematic analysis of Cambodia-Thailand relations between 1950 and 2014 by examining the domestic political forces and international politics as variables in explaining the shifts of the two countries' diplomatic relations.

This research does not cover Khmer-Thai relations before or during the colonial period. Instead, it focuses on the post-World War II era. The rationale for choosing to cover the period 1950-2014 stems from the fact that Thailand was the first country to recognize Cambodia as an autonomous state within the French Indochinese Union in 1950. In other words, 1950 marked the beginning of mutual recognition between Thailand and Cambodia as states amidst the decolonizing process in the region. The regime changes throughout the Cold War era and beyond offer useful rich empirical facts for a comprehensive analysis of the comparative significance of domestic and global political factors as variables in explaining foreign policy choices.

The next section of this chapter reviews important academic contributions to the understanding of Khmer-Thai relations, and the gaps in the scholarship which this dissertation intends to fill in.

1.3. Literature review on Khmer-Thai relations

A significant number of scholarly works on Khmer-Thai relations have been written by Cambodian, Thai, and foreign scholars. These works can be divided into two broad disciplines: the first group belongs to the arts and humanities approach, while the second strand belongs to social science disciplines. As will be shown, some writings fall between these two broad approaches.

In the first category, a few academic works are noteworthy. Thai scholar Charuwan Phungtian, for instance, wrote her doctoral dissertation on “Thai – Cambodian Culture Relationships through Arts,” in which she postulated that Thai culture was influenced by Khmer culture during the Angkorian period. Yet, she also asserted that Indian art served as the prototype of art in Cambodia and Thailand, and that Thai art eventually developed independently thanks to Thai artists’ innovative ability.² Preap Samsopheap, a former Cambodian student in Thailand, wrote his M.A. thesis titled “A Comparative Study of Thai and Khmer Buddhism” and argued that Buddhism is an important source for political legitimacy in both Thailand and Cambodia, although its uninterrupted presence in Thailand since the foundation of the Sukhothai period

² Charuwan Phungtian, “Thai-Cambodian Culture Relationship through Arts” (PhD diss., Magadh University, 2000).

(13th century) means that its influence is stronger in Thailand than in Cambodia.³ He also cautioned that “political leaders should also recognize that if they are to mobilize religion for their legitimacy, they must not remold religion,” because if Buddhism “becomes perverted in the perception and understanding of the faithful it will cease to be a socializing and acculturating force as well as a unifying ideology for all classes.”⁴ San Phalla (a former graduate student at Chulalongkorn University) compared the mural paintings of Reamker and Ramakien (local versions of the Hindu epic tale *Ramayana*) at the Khmer and Thai royal palaces, respectively. His interesting work suggested that, in the context of King Norodom’s reign (second half of the 19th century) when Thai influence on Cambodia was remarkable, a major source for the mural painting of Reamker in the Cambodian royal palace (built during King Norodom’s reign) was the mural painting of Ramakien in the Grand Palace of Thailand. Other sources of inspiration included the Thai Ramakien, the Reamker I and II texts, and the Reamker oral versions. When examining the mural paintings in closer detail, Phalla San suggested that Cambodian artists also modified the architectural designs of the buildings (in the murals), characters’ names, and ornamentations that reflected more of the Cambodian context (rather than pure duplication from the Thai murals).⁵ Overall, however, Thai influence on the Khmer mural paintings was rather salient, because, according to the author:

King Norodom who was the founder of the Royal Palace and the Temple of the Emerald Buddha, Ukñā Tep Nimit Mak who was the chief painter and architect in cooperation with supreme patriarch Venerable Nil Teang who was the supervisor of the temple’s

³ Samsopheap Preap, “A Comparative Study of Thai and Khmer Buddhism” (M.A. thesis, Mahachulalongkorn-rajabhidyalaya University, 2005).

⁴ Ibid., p. 120.

⁵ See Phalla San, “A Comparison of the Reamker Mural Painting in the Royal Palace of Cambodia and the Ramakien Mural Painting in the Grand Palace of Thailand” (M.A. thesis, Chulalongkorn University, 2007).

construction, all of whom were brought up and/or studied in Bangkok for many years.⁶

Siamese influence over Cambodia during the second half of the 19th century and early 20th century was also evident in the preference of the Thommayuth sect of Theravada Buddhism in the Cambodian court. As Penny Edwards noted, “A critical area in which the Thommayuth differed from the [mainstream] Mahanikay was in their emphasis on Siamese and Pali as the correct languages of Buddhism, and in their adoption of print production.” There were also political implications. According to the same author:

In 1902, the protectorate’s perception of Siam as a hive of British subterfuge was given a new, Khmer dimension with the installation of the exiled Francophobic contender for the Cambodian throne, Prince Norodom Yukanthor (1860–1934), in Bangkok. Schooled in Sanskrit and Pali and conversant with Thai, Lao, and Burmese as well as French, Yukanthor, who remained a prime Sûreté suspect for spates of popular unrest in Cambodia until his death, maintained close links with members of the Siamese and Khmer *sangha* throughout his exile. Ever mindful of the political liability of such connections, the French Protectorate sought to attenuate links between Siam and Cambodia. [...] By establishing competing facilities for the study of Buddhism in Cambodia [which was to become the Buddhist Institute in Phnom Penh], and particularly by promoting the parallel study of Khmer and Pali and expanding the dissemination of Khmer tracts and Khmer language education in the protectorate, the French administration paved the way for a later emphasis by reformists from within Cambodia on the Khmerization of Buddhist practice.⁷

The scholarly works above demonstrate the mutual influences in the Khmer-Thai cultural relationship since the Angkorian period. Yet, prominent Thai historian Charnvit Kasetseri also described Khmer-Thai relations as a “love-hate relationship.”

⁶ Ibid., p. 239.

⁷ Penny Edwards, *Cambodge: The Cultivation of Nation, 1860–1945* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2007), p. 111.

Despite the admiration of Angkorian civilization, from which the early Thai kingdom of Ayudhya derived its culture, Charnvit argued that Thai views about Khmer people is generally negative: the Khmers are viewed as “traitors and ingrates” in Thai history education. Such views have been perpetuated and reinforced by the Thai elites since the launching of nationalism-promoting campaigns during the reign of King Vajiravudh in the early twentieth century.⁸ Likewise, a study by Kimly Ngoun on Khmer perception(s) of Thai people also point to existing negative views by Khmer people towards the Thais. The author examined the depiction of the Thais in various versions of the popular Khmer legend “Preah Ko Preah Keo” and suggested that all versions of the legend “portrayed Thai people more or less negatively. The Thais were perceived as invasive, ambitious, tricky etc.,” and that “in the modern time[s] the legend was popular and influential when there occurred political tension[s] between both countries.”⁹ Nonetheless, he also noted that among the educated Cambodians in Phnom Penh, perceptions of the Thais were both positive (e.g. Thais as clever and hardworking) and negative (resulting from the teaching of history, news releases about border encroachment, behavior of some Thai people etc.). He concluded that “This reflects that there is still lack of understanding between people of both countries (*sic*).”¹⁰

Perhaps no other scholars have written more extensively on various issues on Cambodian-Thai relations than prominent Thai scholar Puangthong Rungswasdisap,

⁸ See Charnvit Kasetsiri, “Thailand-Cambodia: A Love-Hate Relationship,” *Kyoto Review of Southeast Asia* 3 (March 2003). Accessible at: http://kyotoreview.cseas.kyoto-u.ac.jp/issue/issue2/article_242.html.

⁹ Kimly Ngoun, “The Legend of Preah Ko Preah Keo and Its Influence on the Cambodian Perception of the Thais” (M.A. thesis, Chulalongkorn University, 2006), p. v.

¹⁰ Ibid.

currently a political science professor at Chulalongkorn University. Her doctoral dissertation titled “War and Trade: Siamese Interventions in Cambodia 1767 – 1851,” completed in 1995, re-examined the relations between Siam and Cambodia from the founding of the Chakri Dynasty to the end of the reign of Rama III of Siam (18-19th centuries). Unlike other history experts on Cambodia who tended to view Khmer-Thai relations in terms of geopolitical factors (i.e. balance of power against Vietnam), Puangthong argued that Siam’s intervention in Cambodia during this period was determined largely by economic reasons. That is, after Ayudhya was destroyed by the Burmese, Cambodia was considered by the Chakri rulers to be a good source for manpower and trade control, which could provide economic advantages to Siam to rebuild herself as a regional power.¹¹ In addition to her dissertation, Puangthong also wrote a few articles and reports on Cambodian-Thai relations, which provided useful empirical data, especially for the last two chapters of this dissertation. These include her discussion of Thailand’s backing of the Khmer Rouge during the 1980s, and Thailand’s investments to and border trades with Cambodia during the 1990s as part of Thailand’s shifting regional strategies.¹² Most recently, she also published a book that contributed to the scholarship on the recent Preah Vihear conflict. Puangthong reckoned that the conflict was fuelled by the “uncivil” society groups in Thailand, particularly the anti-Thaksin and ultra-nationalist group – the People’s Alliance for Democracy (PAD). She wrote:

¹¹ Puangthong Rungswasdisab, “War and Trade: Siamese Interventions in Cambodia 1767 – 1851” (PhD diss., University of Wollongong, 1995).

¹² See Puangthong Rungswasdisab, “Thailand’s Response to the Cambodian Genocide,” *Cambodian Genocide Program*, Yale University, at http://www.yale.edu/cgp/thailand_response.html; and Puangthong R. Pawakapan, “Impact of Thailand Diplomatic Commitment and Economic Investment to Cambodia after 1991: the Role of Neighboring Country to Stabilize and Develop a Post-conflict Country” report presented to Japan International Cooperation Agency, Bangkok Office, June 2006.

While supposedly conservative state agencies in Thailand and Cambodia were working towards a peaceful and sustainable solution, the civil society campaign aggravated hatred and distrust between the peoples of the two countries. [...] The power of nationalism and historical antagonism triumphed over government efforts to build good neighborliness.¹³

In addition to the aforementioned scholarly works, recent academic publications on Cambodian-Thai diplomatic relations have been by and large conflict-oriented. Thanks to the anti-Thai riots in early 2003 and the eruption of the Preah Vihear conflict in late 2008, most scholars have focused on the (roots of) conflicts between the two nations. Pheakny Ourn, for example, wrote her MA thesis titled “Cambodian-Thai Relations in the Contemporary Period,” but focusing only on Cambodia-Thailand relations during the colonial period, as well as the relationship strain in the 1950s and the anti-Thai riots in 2003 in Phnom Penh (that is, the 1970s-1990s were not accounted for in her research). Though acknowledging the influence of domestic politics, she concluded that “the very root causes of the most serious relations between Cambodia and Thailand in the modern times stemmed from mutual misunderstandings and vagueness of history and culture.”¹⁴ Similarly, focusing on the 2003 anti-Thai riots, Alexander Hinton offered an interesting look into the online discussions/arguments following the attacks on the Thai embassy in Phnom Penh. He argued that “the anti-Thai riots were linked in part to a set of discourses and imagery

¹³ Puangthong R. Pawakapan, *State and Uncivil Society in Thailand at the Temple of Preah Vihear* (Singapore: ISEAS, 2012), pp. 101-102.

¹⁴ Pheakny Ourn, “Cambodian-Thai Relations in the Contemporary Period” (MA thesis, Waseda University, 2003), pp. 63-64.

that have long been central to assertions of ‘Khmerness’ and constructions of the ‘Other’.”¹⁵

More recently, following the border disputes since 2008, academic works on Cambodia-Thailand relations have concentrated mostly on the Preah Vihear conflict and nationalist discourses. Kimly Ngoun, currently a Cambodian doctoral candidate at the National University of Australia, for instance, wrote an op-ed arguing that the latest Cambodian-Thai conflict is rooted in an historical legacy of hostility and mistrust, as well as constructions of history by the elites in both countries.¹⁶ His ongoing doctoral research also attempts to examine the divergent perceptions of ordinary Cambodians in Phnom Penh and in the border area toward the temple dispute, and how the Cambodian state has been successful in “conjuring up an image of the ancient monument as a national symbol, blending primordialist ideas with potent modern beliefs about the state and its guardianship of the nation.”¹⁷

A recent book co-authored by Cambodian and Thai scholars titled “Preah Vihear: A Guide to the Thai-Cambodian Conflicts and Its Solutions” also affirmed the power of historical animosity. The authors wrote: “History plays a crucial role in today’s interactions between Thailand and Cambodia. It helps explain why and how the conflict has endured despite the fact that the international environment has

¹⁵ Alexander Hinton, “Khmerness and the Thai ‘Other’: Violence, Discourse and Symbolism in the 2003 Anti-Thai Riots in Cambodia,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* Vol. 37, No. 3 (2006): p.445.

¹⁶ Kimly Ngoun, “Thai-Cambodian Conflict Rooted in History,” *East Asia Forum* (27 January, 2012), <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2012/01/27/thai-cambodian-conflict-rooted-in-history/>. Accessed February 13, 2014.

¹⁷ Kimly Ngoun’s dissertation is titled “Understanding Khmer Nationalism in the Preah Vihear Temple Conflict with Thailand: The State, the City, and the Border”; for the dissertation’s synopsis, see: http://billboard.anu.edu.au/event_view.asp?id=104735.

consistently changed.”¹⁸ Nonetheless, they also acknowledge the nexus of nationalism and domestic political forces as factors that can cause strain in the relationships between the two countries:

Historical memory has become a primary determining factor in Thai-Cambodian relations, particularly whenever the two countries’ respective political leaders encounter legitimacy crises at home. To divert people’s attention from domestic issues, leaders have fanned the flame of nationalism while making enemies across the border. In the process, they have rekindled bitter memories of the historical past to justify their foreign policy toward enemies in the neighborhood, as reflected in the state’s perception of the virtuous self versus the evil other. In other words, domestic politics has been the main source of bilateral tensions between Thailand and Cambodia. Although history and nationalism can have devastating effects on bilateral relations, they have remained useful apparatuses for political leaders in achieving their much-needed legitimacy and strengthening their power positions.¹⁹

Similarly, using the *first-image* perspective,²⁰ Martin Wagener also argued that:

[...] state leaders’ motivations in low-intensity border conflicts, such as Preah Vihear, are fundamentally different from those in high-intensity border conflicts. It will become clear that Thailand and Cambodia, because of their central statesmen’s domestically determined motivations, are interested in neither a resolution nor an escalation of the border dispute.²¹

His argument was applicable to the context of strained Cambodian-Thai relations between 2008 and 2011, when Abhisit Vejjajiva held power in Thailand, but less so for the relationship since late 2011 after Yingluck became prime minister in Thailand.

¹⁸ Charnvit Kasetsiri, Sothirak Pou, and Pavin Chachavalpungpun, *Preah Vihear: A Guide to the Thai-Cambodian Conflict and Its Solutions* (Bangkok: White Lotus Press, 2013), p. 2.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

²⁰ The *first-image* here refers to the function of human nature, as opposed to the societies of states (*second image*) or the international system (*third image*) identified by Kenneth Waltz as levels of analyses in explaining the occurrences of wars. See Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, the State and War: A Theoretical Analysis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959).

²¹ Martin Wagener, “Lessons from Preah Vihear: Thailand, Cambodia, and the Nature of Low-Intensity Border Conflicts,” *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, Vol. 30, No. 3 (2011): p. 30.

1.4. Significance of the research

The literature review on Cambodian-Thai relations presented above is far from exhaustive. Nevertheless, there are gaps which this dissertation seeks to address. This research on Cambodia-Thailand diplomatic relations between 1950 and 2014 attempts to contribute to the fields of area studies (particularly Southeast Asian Studies) and international relations in two significant ways.

Firstly, as demonstrated in the preceding section, although earlier studies have examined Cambodia-Thailand diplomatic relations, they tended to focus on specific conflicts (e.g. the anti-Thai riots in 2003 or the Preah Vihear conflict) or on one regime only (e.g. relations during the Khmer Rouge regime), but not across the time span focused in this research. Accordingly, this dissertation is the first major attempt to present a comprehensive empirical study of Cambodia-Thailand relations since the post-World War II period to the present.

Secondly, not only does the research fill in the gaps in the Cambodian-Thai relations scholarship in this period, it also offers an alternative and more useful theoretical framework for analyzing Cambodian-Thai relations (discussed in more detail in the next section). As such, it is also hoped that this dissertation contributes further as a case study to the broader scholarships on border conflict studies, nationalism in international relations, and foreign policy analysis (FPA).

1.5. Theoretical framework

In seeking to explain the fluctuations in Cambodia-Thailand relations (and understand why sometimes conflicts occurred, and sometimes they didn't), this dissertation utilizes the “social conflict” analysis proposed by Lee Jones. The “social conflict” analysis model differs from realist approaches in international relations theories, because it does not view a country's foreign policy as an outcome of unified rationalization of national interests in response to international shifts of balance of power or the “objective” material threat of a rising powerful neighboring state. Instead, as Lee Jones postulated:

[...] rather than seeing states as unitary actors responding to or securitizing threats, [...] we should analyze the way in which potential security issues are viewed by different societal forces operating upon and within the state and understand security policy as the outcome of power struggles between these forces. *Different societal groups always evaluate potential security issues in relation to their own interests, ideologies, and strategies* (emphasis added). [...] One social group may perceive and discursively identify something as ‘threatening’, while others may be indifferent or even view the issue positively.²²

Hence, instead of viewing Cambodian-Thai foreign relations as relations between two unitary states, one should “zoom in” and “unpack” the two states and examine the societal/political groups who wield the power and/or who are responsible for foreign policy decision-making. Foreign policy of Cambodia toward Thailand, and vice versa, should not be understood as policies that reflect *the national interest* of each country, but rather as a reflection of the attempt to advance the interests of the societal group in power vis-à-vis competing social/political groups at home. Therefore, unlike realist

²² Lee Jones, “Beyond Securitization: Explaining the Scope of Security Policy in Southeast Asia,” *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* (2011): p. 4.

paradigms, the “social conflict” analysis model takes into account regime types, ideologies, and interests of the competing power groups (rather than unitary state’s national interests) when evaluating their foreign policy choices toward neighboring countries.

Certainly, other international relations theories have challenged the dominance of *realism* in the studies of international relations, especially following the end of the Cold War. Liberal theories, for example, do not view states’ relations as simply zero-sum competition, but rather that states also seek cooperation to maximize their interests (e.g. through economic cooperation and trades). A strand within liberal theories is the “democratic peace” theory:

The reasoning as to why democracies would be peaceful has generally relied on either a monadic or a dyadic analysis. The monadic view (which emphasizes the attributes of a single country) argues that democracies are always more peaceful than nondemocracies because of their nonviolent norms or the restraint of the citizenry. The more constrained dyadic view (which looks at the relationships between a pair of countries) argues that democracies are less likely to go to war only with other democracies. Both variations of this democratic peace perspective have become increasingly popular among international relations scholars, and support for the democratic peace in a variety of statistical studies has led many to claim that the democratic peace is “as close as anything we have to an empirical law in world politics.”²³

As Scott Burchill put it, “In broad summary [liberal theorists] concluded that the prospects for the elimination of war lay with a preference for democracy over aristocracy and free trade over autarky.”²⁴ As can be seen here, liberalism is to some

²³ Meredith R. Sarkees and Frank W. Wayman, *Resort to War: A Data Guide to Inter-State, Extra-State, and Intra-State, and Non-State Wars, 1816-2007* (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2010), p. 3.

²⁴ Scott Burchill *et al*, 3rd edition, *Theories of International Relations* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 58.

extent a normative theory, which cannot always explain the causes of inter-state conflicts. Likewise, as in realist paradigms, liberal theories tend to be state-centric and cannot explain much about the possibilities of conflict when at least one of the regimes is not democratic. A further complication is the fact that characterizing whether a regime is a consolidated democracy or not is never a simple task.²⁵

Various strands of constructivism have also contributed significantly to the fields of IR and Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) “by de-centering the state from our analysis of security and insecurity, insisting that we should be concerned more with the insecurity of people than that of states,” and from a constructivist perspective, “security threats are not objectively given but are constructed through the production of intersubjective understandings of an issue as ‘threatening’ to some referent object.”²⁶ A constructivist approach is useful in elaborating how securitizing actors (typically state elites) “strategically identify issues as ‘threats’ through discursive ‘speech acts’ in order to persuade political audiences to legitimize the suspension of normal politics and mobilize extraordinary measures and resources to deal with the issue.”²⁷ But as Lee Jones rightly argued, while constructivism explains the way in which security policies are politically produced, “it is unable to account for why some issues are securitized over others because it neglects political contestation and the social economic contexts of policy formation.”²⁸

²⁵ For a discussion on realism and liberalism in international relations, see *ibid.*, pp. 29-83.

²⁶ Lee Jones, “Beyond Securitization,” p. 6.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

The “social conflict” analysis model offers a useful framework in approaching the question posed in this research: what have caused the fluctuations in Cambodia-Thailand diplomatic relations during the past six decades? If foreign policy is not solely determined by an “objective” threat and unified rationalization of national interest, what domestic factors affect the two countries’ relations? Why did regime/government changes in one country sometimes create conflicts but other times improved the relations between Cambodia and Thailand during the past sixty years? And if nationalism and historical animosity are factors that cause conflicts between the two nations as many scholars have proposed, why are these factors not the constant variables in affecting Cambodia-Thailand diplomatic relations? Instead, why are they (as will be shown in this research) selectively utilized by state elites? In other words, why did nationalism become a strain in the two nations’ relations in one period (or between certain governments/leaders) and not in others? For example, why did nationalism become a heated issue between 2008 and 2011, but not during the 1990s, or since late 2011 to the present?

1.6. Thesis statements

The dissertation advances two main inter-related arguments. Firstly, looking beyond international balances of power and viewing states not merely as unitary actors but as entities that comprise competing societal forces, this research argues that change in government/regime in Cambodia or Thailand affects their foreign relations positively if the two countries share relatively democratic ideals (e.g. if both are civilian, democratically-elected governments), have mutual interests (e.g. in business and

economic ties), and/or shared security strategies (e.g. having common enemies internally or externally) with the government of the other state. Conversely, change in government/regime in at least one of the two states affects their relations negatively if the new government does not share similar regime type, ideology, and/or mutual strategic interest with the government of the other state, and worse, if it has more in common with the dissidents of the government of the other country.

Secondly, although historical animosity and nationalism exist as factors which occasionally affect Cambodia-Thailand diplomatic relations, this research proposes that they are not constant variables. Instead, the political elites of Cambodia and/or Thailand are most likely to invoke nationalism only if they suffer a legitimacy crisis at home, and more importantly, if the government of the other state does not share mutual ideology, economic interests, and/or strategic security alignment. The latter aspect is particularly important in explaining why the government of Cambodia or Thailand sometimes chooses to fire up nationalist sentiment against the other state but not at other times.

1.7. Research methodologies and data collection

This qualitative research utilizes a historiographical approach and a narratives analysis. That is, historical and contemporary narrative sources on Cambodia-Thailand relations available in monographs, academic publications, memoirs, news archives are relied upon for writing this research. To the extent that the available sources permit, special attention is paid to whether or not different sources on the

same issue corroborate one another. Discursive analyses of leaders' memoirs, speeches, quotes, remarks, and so on, are also done to trace the construction and projection of their ideological orientation.

The empirical data used in this research are drawn from various sources – both primary and secondary. In terms of secondary sources, numerous books, academic journals, and dissertations related to the topic of this research were collected at different times during my trips to different libraries in Cambodia and Thailand, including the Center for Khmer Studies (CKS)'s library in Siem Reap and Chulalongkorn University's library in Bangkok. My private collection on the history of Cambodia and Thailand are also sources for this research. As for primary sources, a number of institutes hold useful collections on different periods. For instance, the National Archives of Cambodia (NAC) provides documents related to Cambodia's foreign relations during the 1950s and 1960s, while the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam) and the Bophana Audiovisual Resource Center both hold complementary and relevant documents related to Cambodian-Thai relations during the Khmer Rouge period (1975-1979). The Thailand Information Center of Chulalongkorn University also houses a rich collection on Thailand's foreign relations and security issues, especially for the period of the 1980s and early 1990s. News archives from the *Phnom Penh Post* and the Royal Government of Cambodia's *New Vision* monthly newsletters also provide some insights on the development of Cambodian-Thai relations during the past two decades.

There are, however, some limitations to the sources collected for this research as well. While Khmer language sources are available and analyzed, primary sources in the Thai language are not. It is hoped that the primary sources obtained from Thailand written in the English language by Thai scholars from different periods should at least partially compensate for this shortcoming. Another issue is related to the inaccessibility for interviews with people who had been involved either in foreign policy making or in various activities in the border areas. While some claimed to have fragile memories of the past, others have cited sensitivity of the issues and refused to take part in any interviews. Therefore, this research was not able to benefit very much from personal interviews, and has to rely mostly on written sources.

1.8. Structure of the dissertation

In addition to this introductory chapter (Chapter 1), the dissertation is divided into 5 separate chapters, and a final conclusion (Chapter 7). Chapter 2 of the dissertation examines Cambodia-Thailand diplomatic relations between 1950 (when Thailand recognized Cambodia as an autonomous state in the French Indochinese Union) and 1970 (when Prince Sihanouk of Cambodia was deposed by General Lon Nol). The Preah Vihear temple and border conflicts, the ideological orientation of Prince Sihanouk which was at odds with that of Sarit Thanarat of Thailand, as well as the domestic political struggle in Cambodia, and Thailand's support for the Cambodian dissidents are discussed. Chapter 3 looks at relations during the Khmer Republic (1970-1975) rule. While initially the regime change in Cambodia resulted in the realignment of foreign policy toward a pro-U.S. position (and consequently amicable

relations with Thailand), it was eventually somewhat interrupted by the 1973 uprising in Thailand and the retreat of the Thai military from Thai politics. Chapter 4 discusses the fluctuating relations between Cambodia and Thailand during the Khmer Rouge regime (1975-1979), when a number of successive governments in Thailand (alternating between civilian and conservative and later moderate military governments) adjusted their relationship with Cambodia in accordance with their own domestic strategic positions. Chapter 5 analyzes Cambodian-Thai foreign relations in the context of Vietnamese control over Cambodia during the People's Republic of Kampuchea regime (1979-1991) and Thailand's support for Cambodian resistance factions, as well as the changing political forces in Thailand in the late 1980s that brought about a civilian government in Thailand and eventual rapprochement with Cambodia. Chapter 6 examines Cambodia-Thailand foreign relations in the post-Cold War era. Discussion of this chapter touches on the re-establishment of diplomatic ties between the two states amidst the ongoing conflicts in Cambodia (as Thailand was still having business dealings with the outlawed Khmer Rouge guerillas) during the 1990s. The chapter further analyzes the anti-Thai riots in Phnom Penh in early 2003, the close ties between Thaksin Shinawatra and Hun Sen (thereby between Thailand and Cambodia), the border conflict between late 2008 and 2011, and the resumption of friendly relations afterwards. The last chapter of the dissertation provides an overview of Cambodia-Thailand relations between 1950 and 2014, and concluding remarks regarding the significant influences of power politics on foreign policy, as well as a brief discussion of the implications for future diplomatic relations between Cambodia and Thailand.

As such, it is expected that this dissertation not only provides an extensive empirical discussion on Cambodia-Thailand relations during the periods covered, but also offers an alternative theoretical framework by using the “social conflict” analysis model for viewing Cambodian-Thai relations, and therefore contributes further to the ongoing academic debates on contemporary theories in international relations and area studies about the significant roles of domestic factional politics and foreign policy choices (e.g. in the recent case of the ongoing enmity between Ukraine and Russia over the Crimean issue).

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Chapter 2: *Sangkum Reastr Niyum* Period (1955-1970)

2.1. Introduction

This chapter discusses the diplomatic relations between Cambodia under King (and later Prince) Sihanouk, and the successive Thai governments that were in power between 1950 and 1970. The chapter traces the shift of the relationship between the two countries from being neutral neighbors after World War II to becoming adversaries during the next two decades. As postulated in the preceding chapter in this dissertation, understanding why diplomatic relations between the two countries shifted the way they did necessitates that we apply the “social conflict” analysis, which proposes that states are not unitary actors, but are comprised of competing societal groups who perceive security threats differently and pursue foreign policy in accordance with their own interests, strategy, and ideology. Therefore, relations between Cambodia and Thailand should not be understood as those between two unitary states, but between different groups in each country who control (or compete for) power, and how they perceive the other side as either being friends or foes depending upon their political interests and ideologies.

Various scholars have tended to focus on the Preah Vihear conflict and nationalist antagonism when writing about Cambodia-Thailand relations during this period. Without looking at the domestic political struggles in both Cambodia and Thailand, however, analyses on the two nations’ relations are incomplete. While Prince Sihanouk of Cambodia attempted to pursue a neutralist policy amidst the Cold War

conflict, he resented Thailand's support for the Cambodian dissidents against him. The anti-communist military leaders in Thailand, on the other hand, considered Sihanouk's neutralist policy a mere façade for his alliance with the communist bloc, a relationship they perceived as a threat to Thailand's domestic and regional securities. From Cambodia's independence in 1953 to 1970, relationships between Thailand and Cambodia could be described as hostile. Nevertheless, fluctuations during this period also occurred, and are discussed below.

2.2. Cambodia and Thailand in World War II

Before analyzing the relations between Cambodia and Thailand during the *Sangkum* period (1955 – 1970), it is worth discussing the precedent events during and after World War II in both Cambodia and Thailand that would shape the political environment and relations between the two countries after the war.

During World War II, most of the Southeast Asian nations were subject to Japanese occupation. Several scholars on Southeast Asian history have suggested that the Japanese occupation in the region, despite its abuses on the local populations, also facilitated the emergence of strong nationalist movements (psychologically and militarily) against the return of Western colonial rule.¹ In the case of Cambodia (as well as Laos and Vietnam), the French were able to retain their control during the war thanks to the Vichy government's alliance with Nazi Germany. Nonetheless, Cambodia was not completely unaffected by the Japanese presence in the region.

¹ See Nicholas Tarling, *A Sudden Rampage: The Japanese Occupation of Southeast Asia, 1941-1945* (London: C. Hurst & Co. Ltd., 2001).

During World War II, Thailand was ruled by a nationalist military government under General Phibunsongkram, who signed a non-aggression pact with Japan which permitted Japanese troops to be stationed in Thailand in exchange for Japanese cooperation. Taking this as a good opportunity, the Thai government in 1940 decided to pursue a military excursion against Cambodia to claim adjacent provinces that Siam (as Thailand was known before 1939) had had to return to the French protectorate in Cambodia in 1904 and 1907. Although Thailand was more successful on the ground, the French forces had an upper-hand at the sea. The conflict between Thailand and the French lasted until 1941, when Japan stepped in to mediate. As Arne Kislenko put it, “The Franco-Thai War of 1940-1 was decided not so much in the field as by Japan’s intervention.”² The intervention by Japan resulted in France agreeing to grant Battambang and Siem Reap provinces (excluding Angkor Wat) in exchange for monetary compensation. A Khmer nationalist named Poc Khun, founder of the anti-French *Khmer Issarak* movement, was given the position of representative of Battambang Province in the Thai parliament, while a Khmer-Thai political leader named Yat Hwaidee was awarded the position of governorship of Siem Reap Province (renamed Phibulsongkram Province in honor of the Thai Premier who had just promoted himself to Field Marshal).³

It was only in March 1945 that the Japanese carried a *coup d’force* against the French colonial officials, as France was by then under the control of General Charles DeGaulle. Soon afterward, the Japanese requested that King Norodom Sihanouk

² Arne Kislenko, “Bending with the Wind: The Continuity and Flexibility of Thai Foreign Policy,” *International Journal*, Vol. 57, No. 4 (2002): p. 540.

³ Punnee Soonthornpoch, *From Freedom to Hell: A History of Foreign Interventions in Cambodian Politics and Wars* (New York: Vantage Press, 2005), p 29.

declare independence from France. In April that same year, Son Ngoc Thanh, a Cambodian nationalist who had sought refuge in Tokyo since 1943, was allowed to return to Cambodia and would become the prime minister in August 1945. Japanese presence in Cambodia, however, was short-lived, as Japan was forced to surrender after the atomic bombs were dropped in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August that same year.

Although the Japanese presence in Cambodia was brief, it did have an impact on the future of Cambodian politics. As in other parts of Southeast Asia, the Japanese occupation would alter the nature of colonial rule in Cambodia, where the return of the French in October 1945 encountered little resistance.⁴ Nevertheless, to appease any similar independence movements elsewhere in the region, the French felt the necessity to accommodate Cambodian political sentiment by allowing the first national election to be held in June 1946, which gave birth to the country's first constitution the following year.⁵ The French as a victor among the Allies in the war was also able to demand Thailand to return the three provinces back to Cambodia following the agreement signed in Washington, D.C. on November 17, 1946. Thailand agreed to the French demand as a precondition for its admission to the newly-founded United Nations.⁶ Nevertheless, prior to their agreement to handover the provinces to Cambodia, Thailand under Premier Pridi Phanomyong had also

⁴ This was different from what happened in Vietnam, for instance, where the French encountered strong resistance in the north from the communist Viet Minh led by Ho Chi Minh, which led to the First Indochina War (1946-1954) until the French were badly defeated at Dien Bien Phu in northern Vietnam.

⁵ For detailed accounts from this period, see David Chandler, *The Tragedy of Cambodian History: Politics, War and Revolutions since 1945* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991).

⁶ For detailed discussion on the Thai position during this negotiation process, see Manich Jumsai, *History of Thailand & Cambodia: From the Days of Angkor to the Present* (Bangkok: Chalermnit, 1970), pp. 208-211.

provided support to Cambodian dissidents (and supporters of Son Ngoc Thanh) who fled to Battambang (then under Thai control), and later to the jungle, to oppose the return of French colonial rule after the war. The group(s) who called themselves “Khmer Issarak” would become occasional threats to Sihanouk’s rule during the 1950s and 1960s, as well as a thorny element in the Cambodia-Thailand diplomatic relations during that period as well.⁷

2.3. Cambodia and Thailand after World War II

The immediate political consequence of the 1946 election in Cambodia was the emergence of the Democratic Party which won 50 out of 67 seats in the National Assembly. The Democratic Party was led by Sisowath Yutheavong, a highly respected and educated prince who had received his PhD in physics and embraced democratic ideals glorified by the Fourth Republic during his study in France.⁸ The Democratic Party was supported mainly by the emerging non-royal intellectual class whose core objective was to demand independence from France. Judging from some of their members’ early writings in the *Nagaravatta* newspaper (first Khmer language newspaper published in 1937), the Democrats had also harbored their resentment against the presence of Vietnamese civil servants in the Cambodian administration and Chinese dominance in the trade sector, among other things. It is not surprising, therefore, that the French did not favor the dominance of the Democratic Party in

⁷ See Bunchan Mul, *Charet Khmer* (Phnom Penh: 1973).

⁸ Yet, the untimely death of Prince Yutheavong in 1947 ushered in factionalism in the Democratic Party in the following years to come. See Justin Corfield, *The History of Cambodia* (Oxford: Greenwood Press, 2009), pp. 43-44.

Cambodian politics. King Sihanouk on his part did not seem to directly support any side at this point.

In Thailand, despite the fact that Premier Phibulsongkram had sided with Japan during World War II, the United States was keen on securing as many allies in Southeast Asia as possible in the wake of its fear of the spread of communism in the region. Therefore, after a brief interlude, Phibulsongkram was able to return as Prime Minister of Thailand in 1948 with the support of the Thai military and tacit approval of Harry S. Truman's administration.⁹ From this period onward, Thailand would become and has remained a close U.S. ally in Southeast Asia.¹⁰ This in turn would also have an impact on Cambodian-Thai relations during the Cold War period.

In 1950, the United States recognized Cambodia as an autonomous state within the French Union.¹¹ Soon afterward, Thailand followed suit, becoming the first Asian country to recognize Cambodia as such. Thus began a period of a relatively stable relationship between Cambodia and Thailand, as the governments in both countries

⁹ Arne Kislenko, "Bending with the Wind," p. 542.

¹⁰ Between 1950 and 1975, Thailand received approximately US\$650 million in economic assistance, US\$940 million for defense and security, US\$760 million in operating costs, and US\$250 million to construct six major air bases in the country. Additional US\$850 million US expenditure was also pumped into Thai economy to support U.S. servicemen stationed in Thailand and on leave from Vietnam. With more than US\$2 billion of aid, Thailand was the second largest aid recipient from the US in Southeast Asia next to South Vietnam. See Robert J. McMahon, "What Difference Did It Make? Assessing the Vietnam War's Impact on Southeast Asia," in Lloyd C. Gardner and Ted Gittinger (eds.), *International Perspectives on Vietnam* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2000), p. 202. Cited in Arne Kislenko, "Bending with the Wind," pp. 542-3.

¹¹ On February 7, 1950, France granted Cambodia (as well as Laos and Vietnam) autonomy within the French Union. On July 11 that same year, the first US diplomat presented his credential to King Norodom Sihanouk of Cambodia. It was only on June 24, 1952 that the U.S. Legation in Phnom Penh was elevated to Embassy status. See U.S. State Department's official website: <http://history.state.gov/countries/cambodia> (accessed August 16, 2012). Relations between the U.S. and Cambodia prior to that had been mainly in the form of missionary work and limited trade ties. See Kenton Clymer, *The United States and Cambodia, 1870-1969: From Curiosity to Confrontation* (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004).

were both opposed to the French. It should be noted that during this period, Thailand also secretly supported the Khmer Serei (Free Khmer) movement led by Son Ngoc Thanh, whose intention was to achieve total independence from France. Nevertheless, such support did not sabotage the relations between Cambodia and Thailand, as the Khmer Serei and the Democrats in Cambodia shared the same objective. The only difference between them was the belief of the former that Cambodian independence could only be achieved via the use of military (in this case, guerilla) forces rather than formal politics.

2.4. The Royal Crusade of Independence of Norodom Sihanouk

A person who would greatly shape the modern political history of Cambodia and its foreign relations with the world was no one other than Norodom Sihanouk. Crowned by the French as King of Cambodia in 1941 when he was only 19 years old, Sihanouk would move against the French by demanding independence for Cambodia in 1953. The process of demanding independence, or the “Royal Crusade for National Independence,” as Sihanouk called it, is worth discussing here, as it would affect King Sihanouk’s perception of Thailand and Cambodia’s relations with that country in the following years.

In February 1953, King Sihanouk almost shocked the French by his dramatic and immediate demand for Cambodia’s independence. He made promises to the Cambodian people that he would achieve independence for Cambodia within two years. Many people (including some royal members and French officials) were quite

surprised by Sihanouk's move. This was the case because, unlike the Democrats, he had been indifferent toward French rule in Cambodia before 1953, or at least appeared to be so. Nevertheless, it seems quite plausible that Sihanouk made his calculations and thought it was the right time to demand independence from the French. Domestically, his move increased his popularity among the people and created political advantage over the Democrats, who had still been unable to achieve independence for the country. As T. Girling noted, "It was to pre-empt the nationalist appeal of the Democratic Party and Son Ngoc Thanh on the one hand and of the revolutionary Issarak allied to the Vietminh on the other that Sihanouk staged his dramatic and successful "Crusade for Independence"."¹²

Sihanouk's decision might have also been based on his prediction that the French would not dare to commit themselves to another uprising in Cambodia, as they had already been heavily involved with their war against the Viet Minh in northern Vietnam.

Initially, Sihanouk's move was not very fruitful. After arriving in France, Sihanouk sent a letter to the French president Vincent Auriol on March 5, 1953 requesting a meeting with the latter to discuss the transfer of power to Cambodia. After one week of silence, President Auriol simply asked Sihanouk to return to Cambodia and warned him that he might be out of power if he did not return to Cambodia soon. Sihanouk did not give in and continued his campaign by traveling to the United States, Canada, and Japan, where he made statements and gave interviews to the international press

¹² T. L. S Girling, "The Resistance in Cambodia," *Asian Survey* Vol. 12, No. 7 (1972): p. 553. Many Issarak leaders eventually rallied to Sihanouk's regime, thereby changing the political landscape in favor of Sihanouk. Son Ngoc Thanh, however, refused to join and withdrew to Thailand. See *ibid*.

about his intention. The most noticeable aspect during his campaign at the time was his remark that if the French did not grant Cambodia independence, the Cambodian people might “rise up against the present regime and join the Viet Minh.”¹³ As historian David Chandler pointed out, the statement had one desired effect: the French were willing to reopen talks with the Cambodian negotiation team.¹⁴

Upon his return to Cambodia, King Sihanouk attempted to seek Thailand’s support for his efforts against French control over Cambodia. In June 1953, he travelled to Thailand. To his surprise, the Bangkok government showed less than enthusiastic support for his crusade. He was firmly told that he was only to regard himself as a “plain political refugee” while in Thailand.¹⁵ Perhaps, the Thai government at this point feared its support for Sihanouk would be considered provocative by the French, and more importantly, by the Americans – who did not wish to see Cambodia’s independence lest it eventually fell under communist control. Additionally, Thailand would have preferred an independent Cambodia lead by Sihanouk’s dissidents favorable to its influence. Whatever the case was, it would become the first sign of distance between Sihanouk and the Thai government in the following years.

¹³ Cited in David Chandler, *The Tragedy of Cambodian History*, p. 68.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Milton Osborne, *Sihanouk: Prince of Light, Prince of Darkness* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994), p. 79.

2.5. Cambodia's independence and Sihanouk's initial grip of power (1955-1963)

By 1953, the French had been heavily involved militarily with the communist Viet Minh while French public opinion had already swung against the war.¹⁶ Fearing another conflict with Cambodia, France allowed King Sihanouk to officially proclaim independence for the nation on November 9, 1953, although real independence was only achieved after the Geneva Conference in mid-1954.¹⁷ The political consequence of the achievement of independence for Cambodia meant that King Sihanouk would become even more popular and revered by his people. Whether one would consider his success as opportunistic or a good timing strategy was irrelevant in the eyes of the Cambodian people at that time. For them, the king was regarded as the heroic king of the country, and would continue to play important roles in various capacities in Cambodian political history during the next four decades.

According to the 1947 Cambodian constitution, however, the king was to be a mere symbolic chief of state without political power. Reaching political maturity and having a thirst for control over the country, King Sihanouk pursued his political ambition by abdicating (and was succeeded by his father) and founding the *Sangkum Reastr Niyum* (usually translated as "People's Socialist Community) Party that would win a landslide majority in the 1955 national election. Prior to the election, several members of the Democratic Party had left to join Sihanouk's *Sangkum Reastr Niyum*. Other members of the Democratic Party and the leftist *Pracheachun* Party contested

¹⁶ John A. Tully, *A Short History of Cambodia: From Empire to Survival* (Crow's Nest, New South Wales: Allen & Unwin, 2005), p. 120.

¹⁷ The complete independence would be achieved after the Geneva Conference in 1954, which required all forces (especially Khmer and Vietnamese communists) to withdraw from Cambodian territory.

the election but did not win a seat. The 1955 election thus marked the complete transfer of political power from the Democrats to Sihanouk (who by then took the title of “Prince”).¹⁸ It would also usher in a period of worsening Cambodian-Thai diplomatic relations, until he was deposed in 1970.

A former Thai general Manich Jumsai described Cambodian-Thai relations immediately after Cambodia’s independence as benign, if it was not for Prince Sihanouk’s “indoctrinated” distrust toward Thailand. He wrote:

As soon as Cambodia was given independence by France, the Thai Government recognized her and established diplomatic relationship with Phnom-Penh. But this relationship was not so smooth due to the fact that Sihanouk was *indoctrinated* (emphasis added) by the French to consider Thailand as his perennial enemy, who has always sought to annex her for centuries, and had it not been for French intervention, Cambodia would have already lost her identity. Sihanouk was therefore pushed by this nervous fear and by the suspicion of Thailand’s sincerity.¹⁹

Jumsai had probably exaggerated the fact that Sihanouk had been “indoctrinated” by the French to distrust Thailand. After all, Cambodia’s status had been reduced to that of a vassal state caught between Siam (old name of Thailand) and Vietnam prior to the French protectorate.²⁰ Thai historian Khien Theeravit interestingly noted that “First, although Sihanouk was more sympathetic to the Thais than to the Vietnamese, in the end he had more disputes with Thailand more than with Vietnam.”²¹ Sihanouk’s distrust of Thailand grew stronger as the latter decided to occupy Preah Vihear temple along the two countries’ borders in early 1954. Additionally,

¹⁸ Sihanouk was known as “Samdech Uppa Yuvareach” in Khmer between 1955 and 1970.

¹⁹ Manich Jumsai, *History of Thailand & Cambodia*, p. 213.

²⁰ See David P. Chandler, “Cambodia before the French: Politics in a Tributary Kingdom, 1794-1848” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1973).

²¹ Khien Theeravit, “Thai-Kampuchean Relations: Problems and Prospects,” *Asian Survey*, Vol. 22, No. 6 (June 1982): p. 565.

Thailand's backing of Sihanouk's political rivals and ideological differences between Sihanouk and the Thai military leaders would also add to the deterioration of Cambodia's relationship with Thailand during the 1950s and 1960s. Therefore, relations between the two countries during this period could be explored through three main inter-related themes: Sihanouk's neutralist policy, the Preah Vihear issue, and the "Bangkok Plot."

2.5.1. The case of Preah Vihear temple

Just as the French protectorate helped secure Cambodia from disappearing from the world map, it also created the legacy that caused Cambodia's border disputes with her neighbors, especially with Thailand (and later with Vietnam).²² The Preah Vihear temple and its surrounding territory, situated on the *Dangrek* mountain range along the Cambodian-Thai border became a thorny issue in the two countries' relations, especially during the 1950s, 1960s, and again recently between late 2008 and mid-2011. The Preah Vihear conflict had its roots in the Franco-Siamese Treaty of 1907. While Cambodia insists that the annexed map to the treaty (which placed the temple and the disputed area inside Cambodian territory) be used for the official boundary line, later Thai governments have refused to recognize the map and have instead presented its unilaterally-drawn maps as bases for boundary demarcation. It is not surprising that some scholars were quick to describe Cambodian-Thai enmity as being historically rooted in the temple conflict. This dissertation does not dismiss this proposition. Yet, it argues that the antagonism in this period can be better understood

²² For discussion on Cambodia's boundary demarcation during and after French colonial rule, see Sarin Chhak, ["Boundaries of Cambodia"], Vol. I, II, & III (PhD diss., *Ecole Paris*, 1969?).

by situating it within the larger context of domestic, regional, and international political predicaments (as will be discussed in sections **2.5.2.** and **2.5.3.**). Such an approach is more useful to help one understand why the Preah Vihear conflict only became a hot issue in the 1950s and 1960s, and recently in 2008 (and not between 1970 and 2008). Nevertheless, a discussion of the Preah Vihear issue cannot be overlooked if one is to understand why Cambodia and Thailand's relations were strained in the past and in the recent present.

Manich Jumsai described the Preah Vihear issue as “really unfortunate.” He wrote: “It is a real misunderstanding. It happened out of a molehill which, fired by the pride of politicians on both sides, had become a mountain whose right must be defended by both sides to the last.”²³ He even went a bit too far to claim that “Nobody, neither in Thailand nor in Cambodia, seemed to know anything about Preah Vihear and its importance as a historical monument. What is worse nobody really knows where is the frontier (*sic*).”²⁴ He argued that there had been no Thai military occupation of the temple “as asserted by some American and French historians.”²⁵ Yet, even an official Thai report published in December 1958 claimed that Thailand had been in control over the temple since 1941:

As a matter of fact, Thailand has been in possession of Khao Phra Viharn [or Preah Vihear] since 1941 and, although France protested in 1949, Thailand has continued to be in possession of it without interruption. Thus, the question of Khao Phra Viharn had been pending long before Cambodia attained her independence.²⁶

²³ Manich Jumsai, *History of Thailand & Cambodia*, p. 213.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 214.

²⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Kingdom of Thailand), “Relations between Thailand and Cambodia,” (Bangkok: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1958), p. 2. From the report, Thailand's position seemed to follow the idea that *de facto* control over the temple would imply legitimate possession of the temple, a stance Cambodia refused to accept.

On August 1, 1954, a few months after the Geneva Conference, Thailand stationed its troops at the Preah Vihear temple.²⁷ Thailand's action might have been driven by the belief that the French withdrawal from Cambodia offered a good opportunity to reclaim former territories that they had been unfairly forced to cede to Cambodia by the French. The Preah Vihear temple was a litmus test, which proved to be a problematic move.

After Cambodia accused Thailand of violating Cambodia's sovereignty by occupying the Preah Vihear temple in 1954, relations between the two countries were largely hostile. As U.S. Foreign Bureau Service officer in Cambodia Roger Smith noted in his book:

[...] most of [Cambodia's] relations with Thailand have revolved around a series of incidents involving press and radio attacks on each other, cattle rustling, piracy, mutual charges of false arrests, armed forays by the police forces of both countries, violations of airspace, and Thai territorial claims.²⁸

Preliminary talks between the two countries in 1959 and 1960 were not fruitful. In 1959, for example, Cambodia suggested two possible solutions to the Preah Vihear problem: the joint-administration of the temple by the two countries, or the submission of the case to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) at The Hague.²⁹ The proposal did not receive any concrete response from Thailand, and it was a widely-held belief in the Phnom Penh government at that time that it was Thailand's intention

²⁷ Puy Kea, [*Cambodian Governments from 1945 to 2010*], 2nd edition (Phnom Penh: Reahu Publication, 2010), p. 30.

²⁸ Roger M. Smith, *Cambodia's Foreign Policy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1965), p. 140. For details on verbal attacks and accusations from both sides during this period, see Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Relations between Thailand and Cambodia," (Bangkok: 1959); and Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Kingdom of Cambodia), "Aid Memoire on Khmero-Thai Relations," (Phnom Penh: 1961).

²⁹ Roger M. Smith, *Cambodia's Foreign Policy*, p. 145.

to drag on the issue until Thailand's judicial commitment to the ICJ would expire in 1961. Son Sann, a former Cambodian prime minister under Sihanouk during the 1960s, wrote in his posthumous published memoir that:

Before the founding of the United Nations, Thailand, as a member of the League of Nations in Geneva, had accepted the mandatory arbitration clause of the International Court of Justice through June, 1961. In promising to settle out of the Court, [Thai foreign minister] H.E. Thanat Khoman was attempting to drag this issue out until 1961 – when Thailand would no longer be obligated to accept the mandatory arbitration of the court. Since 1959, Cambodia, aware of Thailand's intention, had been quietly trying to distance itself and discretely bring this issue to the International Court of Justice in The Hague.³⁰

Following Thailand's failure to provide a response, Cambodia unilaterally submitted the Preah Vihear case to the ICJ on October 6, 1959, and despite Thailand's objection, the Court decided on May 26, 1961, that it had the jurisdiction to adjudicate upon this dispute.³¹ On June 15, 1962, almost three years after the case was brought to the Court, the ICJ decided:

by nine votes to three, that Thailand is under an obligation to withdraw any military or police forces, or other guards or keepers, stationed by her at the Temple, or in its vicinity on Cambodian territory;

by seven votes to five, that Thailand is under an obligation to restore to Cambodia any objects of the kind specified in Cambodia's fifth Submission which may, since the date of the occupation of the Temple by Thailand in 1954, have been removed from the Temple or the Temple area by the Thai authorities.³²

³⁰ Son Sann, *The Memoirs of Son Sann* (Phnom Penh: Cambodia Daily Press, 2011), p. 94.

³¹ International Court of Justice, "Case concerning the Temple of Preah Vihear (Cambodia v. Thailand), Merits, Judgment of 15 June 1962: I.C. J. Reports 1962," p. 6.

³² Ibid., p. 35. For a pro-Thailand discussion on the process and the use of evidence during the hearings, see P. Cuasay, "Borders on the Fantastic: Mimesis, Violence, and Landscape at the Temple of Preah Vihear," *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 4 (1998): pp. 849-890.

Thailand not surprisingly reacted strongly to the ICJ's ruling, calling it a "miscarriage of justice" and claiming that it was "contrary to usage and international law."³³ Nevertheless, on July 6, three weeks after the ruling, Thai Foreign Minister Thanat Khoman expressed Thailand's official position to the UN Secretary General as follow:

I wish to inform you that, in deciding to comply with the decision ... His Majesty's Government desires to make an express reservation regarding whatever rights Thailand has, or may have in the future, to recover the Temple of Phra Viharn by having recourse to any existing or subsequently applicable legal process, and to register a protest against the decision of the International Court of Justice awarding the Temple of Phra Viharn to Cambodia.³⁴

Thailand never legally pursued the Preah Vihear case against Cambodia afterward, not until the temple was inscribed as a World Heritage Site in July 2008 following Cambodia's submission. However, before Thai troops withdrew from the temple in 1961, they erected barb-wire barriers around the temple, an action which Cambodia interpreted as being in contempt of the ICJ's decision.³⁵

2.5.2. Prince Sihanouk's "neutrality" and relations with Thailand

The Preah Vihear issue was only one of the factors that put Cambodia and Thailand's relations at strain. Cambodia under Prince Sihanouk received independence when the

³³ Quoted in Roger M. Smith, *Cambodia's Foreign Policy*, p. 149.

³⁴ Quoted in Roger M. Smith, *Cambodia's Foreign Policy*, pp. 150-51.

³⁵ Roger M. Smith, *Cambodia's Foreign Policy*, p. 151. Following the Preah Vihear ruling, a number of Thai students from Thammasat University also made a petition to the university to revoke the honorary doctoral degree it had granted to Prince Sihanouk. This information is quoted with permission from Thai historian Charnvit Kasetsiri's presentation in a public lecture on "The Thai-Cambodian Conflict: Nature and Solution" at the Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace (CICP) in Phnom Penh on February 21, 2012.

world was being divided by the Cold War conflict. Asia was no exception. Between 1946 and 1954, communist Vietnamese (known as Viet Minh) fought against the returning French colonial forces for national independence – a war that became widely known as the First Indochina War. Between 1950 and 1953, the newly formed United Nations under the command of the U.S. intervened on the side of South Korea, which was being invaded by North Korea (backed by communist China). Although Cambodia achieved independence peacefully, Prince Sihanouk was caught between two blocs of major powers. His decisions in the following years were affected by his personal experience and perception of those powers (specifically speaking, Thailand, the United States, and China), his attempt to balance one power against another, as well as domestic political forces that to some extent shaped his foreign policy choices, especially in relation to Thailand and its allies.

In September 1954, the United States and its allies established an equivalent organization of NATO known as “South-East Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO)” to contain communism in Asia. The signatory states included the United States, Britain, France, Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Pakistan, and Thailand. Cambodia under Sihanouk refused to join. Sihanouk’s refusal might have stemmed from his personal belief to stay out of the Cold War by adopting neutrality and a non-alignment policy. However, domestic pressure was also at play. As the late British scholar Michael Leifer pointed out, during the 1955 election campaign, the opposition groups (including the Democrats and the left-wing *Procheachun*) tried to discredit Sihanouk by claiming that the prince was substituting American for French influence,

which would have led to American economic domination.³⁶ Sihanouk, however, also accused the Democrats for being pro-U.S.³⁷ Sihanouk's decision was further reinforced when he attended the Asia-Africa conference in Bandung in 1955 where he met China's premier Zhou Enlai, India's Prime Minister Nehru, and Indonesia's President Sukarno, all of whom reinforced his determination to choose a neutrality policy.³⁸

The fact that Sihanouk refused to join SEATO did not damage Cambodia-U.S. relations. Despite its disgruntlement with Sihanouk's decision, the U.S. continued to provide military aid to Cambodia, hoping to dissuade it from communist influence. By the early 1960s, the Cambodian armed forces had grown to about 35,000 men (1,400 of whom were with the army and 2,000 with the air force), which accounted for between one-fourth and one-third of the national budget.³⁹ According to Stephen Hoadley:

Much of the cost of the defense establishment was borne by foreign powers, including in order of magnitude during the 1955-64 period: the United States, France, the Soviet Union, and the People's Republic of China. The United States gave an average of \$12.2 million annually in military aid and triple that amount in economic aid during this period, thus underwriting about one-third of the Cambodian budget.⁴⁰

³⁶ Michael Leifer, *Cambodia: The Search for Security* (London & New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Inc., 1967), p. 69.

³⁷ See Julio A. Jeldres, *Shadow over Angkor, Volume One: Memoirs of His Majesty King Norodom Sihanouk of Cambodia* (Phnom Penh: Monument Books, 2005), p. 52.

³⁸ Yet, as Prince Sihanouk said in an address to the Sixteenth Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations in September 1961, "Although neutral, we are not, for all that, necessarily abstentionists. When we deem it appropriate to support the proposal of one or another bloc, it is our duty to do so ... We must express our opinion and choose the solution which we think is just." Cited in Abdulgaffar Peang-Meth, "Cambodia and the United Nations: Comparative Foreign Policies under Four Regimes (Volumes I and II)" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1980), pp. 244-245.

³⁹ J. Stephen Hoadley, *Soldiers and Politics in Southeast Asia: Civil-Military Relations in Comparative Perspective, 1933-1975* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2012), p. 131.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 131-132.

For Thailand, however, Cambodia's neutrality was greeted with much suspicion. Thailand had recognized Cambodia's independence in November 1953. Earlier, assistance was also provided to Cambodia in the forms of rehabilitation work and scholarships granted to Cambodian officials to receive training in Thailand in the fields of education, health, forestry, and meteorology etc.⁴¹ But Sihanouk's neutrality (and the emerging Preah Vihear issue in 1954) had put relations between the two countries at odds. As Michael Leifer noted, "Thailand and South Viet-Nam both felt that Cambodia's neutrality was an open invitation to Communist penetration, which could drive a subversive wedge between the members of the anti-Communist alliance in mainland Southeast Asia. They came to regard Cambodia as the willing tool of the Communists."⁴²

While Sihanouk considered Thailand an irredentist state because of the Thai occupation of Preah Vihear, Thailand's mistrust of Cambodia as a pro-Communist state grew much stronger after Cambodia under Sihanouk recognized the People's Republic of China (PRC) in July 1958. Prince Sihanouk's recognition of the PRC was a tactical alliance which the prince hoped to rely on after seeing border incursions from South Vietnam the previous month. Thailand, however, interpreted Cambodia's move as an attempt to intimidate them. According to Michael Leifer:

It has been suggested that the change in government in Thailand in October, 1958, which consolidated Marshal Sarit Thanarat in power, was precipitated in part by the anxiety of the Thai military at the establishment of diplomatic relations between Cambodia and to Chinese People's Republic the previous July.⁴³

⁴¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Relations between Thailand and Cambodia," (Bangkok: 1958), p. 1.

⁴² Michael Leifer, *Cambodia: The Search for Security*, p. 85.

⁴³ Ibid.

In an aide-memoire published in December 1958, the Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs also stated that:

Even the question of frontier delimitation affecting the ruins of that ancient temple, Khao Phra Viharn, could be resolved in an amicable way according to the elementary principles of International Law and justice. But unfortunately, foreign influences have hindered the consideration by Cambodia of this question objectively and practically and have so aroused the susceptibilities of those directing the affairs of that country as to make of this question a thorn in her relations with Thailand.⁴⁴

Certainly, Thailand's anti-communism existed on both the domestic and regional fronts.

Paul W. Chambers & Siegfried O. Wolf argued that:

The [Thai elite] actors at this time [during the Cold War] were Thailand's military and monarchy, who were concerned with maintaining Thailand's territorial integrity with Cambodia but also winning a Communist insurgency... [This perspective] emphasizes Thai national security concerns along the Thai-Cambodian border in the face of foreign-inspired Communist dangers. During this time, such fears guaranteed the primacy of the military and monarchy, the principal pillars of the country's national security.⁴⁵

In fact, Sarit Thanarat was able to rise to power because there was backing by the military, the United States, and the Thai monarchy, all of whom were fervently anti-communist.⁴⁶ It is probably not surprising then that General Sarit Thanarat's ascendance to power in Thailand helped widen the difference between Thailand and Cambodia even further. As negotiations over the Preah Vihear temple failed to

⁴⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Relations between Thailand and Cambodia," (Bangkok: 1958), Preface.

⁴⁵ Paul W. Chambers & Siegfried O. Wolf, "Image-Formation at a Nation's Edge: Thai Perceptions of its Border Dispute with Cambodia – Implications for South Asia," Working Paper No. 52, *Heidelberg Papers in South Asian and Comparative Politics* (February, 2010), p. 8.

⁴⁶ See Chris Baker and Pasuk Phongpaichit, *A History of Thailand* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), Chapter 7.

produce fruitful results, followed by press attacks and violent demonstrations outside the Cambodian Embassy in Bangkok, the Cambodian ambassador presented a note on November 24, 1958 to Bangkok requesting “a temporary *de facto* suspension” of diplomatic relations between the two countries.⁴⁷ In response, Thailand recalled its ambassador, closed the border, and suspended air service.⁴⁸ Immediate attempts to restore relations were not successful since both sides demanded, as a pre-condition, the release of “kidnapped” nationals by the other side’s armed forces. Only with the intervention of the United Nations through Baron Beck-Friss, a personal envoy of the Secretary-General, did the two countries agree to restore diplomatic ties on February 6, 1959. The reconciliation, however, did not last long.

Declassified telegrams sent from the Australian embassies in Phnom Penh and Bangkok to Canberra between 1958 and 1960 suggest that while Sihanouk resented Thailand’s alleged support of the Khmer Serei (which Thailand rejected at the time), the Sarit administration was highly suspicious of Sihanouk’s leaning toward the communists. Sarit’s administration also resented Cambodia’s continued press attacks on Thailand despite the latter’s “patience” not to retaliate. Interestingly, one of the cables sent from Bangkok dated August 8, 1960 noted:

[...] continued press attacks on Thailand were perhaps inspired by Chau Seng [Secretary General of Socialist Youth of Sangkum] who now appeared to be under a good deal of pressure from Right Wing leaders. Efforts of these leaders to restore their own influence would be greatly helped by conciliatory response from Thailand to Cambodian suggestion for talks. On the other hand, Thai rebuff to Cambodia would play into Chau Seng’s hands.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Michael Leifer, *Cambodia: The Search for Security*, p. 87.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Department of External Affairs, Inward cablegram No. I.18330 (August 8, 1960), *National Australian Archives*, Series A1209 Control System 1958/5776.

By October 1961, relations soured again. In an official reception attended by a diplomatic corp, Thai PM Sarit Thanarat complained of the “annoying accusations and arrogance of a head of state who has constantly made himself known as an enemy of Thailand” and allowed himself to be used as a bridgehead permitting the Communists to harm neighboring countries. Sarit concluded that Thailand had to show restraint and endure the annoyance “by taking consolation in the old proverbial tale of a pig challenging a lion to fight.”⁵⁰ Prince Sihanouk reacted by breaking off diplomatic relations with Thailand again on October 23, 1961, after which, diplomatic relations between the two countries remained broken until Sihanouk was ousted from power by Lon Nol in 1970.

2.5.3. The “Bangkok Plot”

The Preah Vihear issue and Sihanouk’s neutrality position in the Cold War which was at odds with the anti-communist military governments in Thailand were not the only problems in Cambodian-Thai relations. Since especially the 18th century, it was frequent that one faction of the Khmer royalty would seek help from Siam (as Thailand was commonly known before 1939) to challenge their rivals in Cambodia, who in turn would seek help from the Vietnamese to counter their rival’s attacks, or vice versa.⁵¹ Before the French rule began, Prince Norodom had fled to Siam to seek Siamese support against his rival brothers (Sisowath and Si Votha). Eventually, after

⁵⁰ Cited in Michael Leifer, *Cambodia: The Search for Security*, p. 89. Prince Sihanouk felt so insulted by Sarit Thanarat’s remarks, that when the latter died in December 1953, Sihanouk decided to proclaim a national holiday to celebrate the death of the Thai prime minister. See Michael Leifer, *Cambodia: The Search for Security*, p. 89.

⁵¹ See David P. Chandler, *A History of Cambodia*, 4th edition (Boulder: Westview Press, 2008), Chapters 6 and 7.

he signed the protectorate agreement with France, King Norodom had to be crowned jointly by both Siam and France in June 1864.⁵² Even after World War II, Cambodian factional politics and foreign interference continued to exist.

As mentioned earlier, Sihanouk's decision to pursue a neutralist position stemmed partially from domestic pressure (i.e. the Democrats and leftist groups who had tried to accuse the king of substituting American for French influence). On the other hand, King Sihanouk had been wary of Thailand's support for Cambodian resistance groups who were his rivals as well. As early as 1946, Thailand under Pridi Phanomyong had provided support to the Khmer Issaraks as an ally against the French, who had just forced Thailand to return the border provinces to Cambodia. Thailand's active support for the Khmer Issaraks eventually ceased after General Phibun staged a coup in 1947, as Phibun's new government had little sympathy for the Khmer resistance group.⁵³ Moreover, after the communist People's Republic of China was established in 1949, Phibun's military and anti-communist government was probably trying to reach a rapprochement with the government in Phnom Penh (then still under the Democratic Party). But when later relations with Sihanouk did not go smoothly, the Thai government was once again in contact with the Cambodian dissidents. Son Ngoc Thanh, who had fled to the jungle in 1955, received aid from Thailand to found the Khmer Serei ("Free Khmers") movement and launch radio broadcasts from Bangkok.

⁵² John Tully A., *A Short History of Cambodia: From Empire to Survival* (Crow's Nest, New South Wales: Allen & Unwin, 2005), pp. 82-83. See also Vandy Kaonn, [*History of Cambodia: From French Colonial Period to the Present*], Vol. I (Phnom Penh: Mou Seth, year?), p. 16. For more discussion in English on French colonial rule in Cambodia, see Tully, John A., *France on the Mekong: A History of the Protectorate in Cambodia, 1863-1953* (Maryland: University Press of America, 2002).

⁵³ Elizabeth Becker, *When the War Was Over: Cambodia and the Khmer Rouge Revolution* (New York: PublicAffairs, 1998), p. 69. Without Thailand's support, the Issaraks had to turn to the communist Vietminh for support.

Prince Sihanouk regularly complained to the press and the governments of Thailand and South Vietnam for providing support to the Khmer Serei and Khmer Issaraks, terming such provisions “invasions” of Cambodian territory.⁵⁴ In his memoir, Sihanouk also told of Son Ngoc Thanh’s alleged attempt to seek a pro-American foreign policy for Cambodia with India:

Earlier, Son Ngoc Thanh had contacted Nehru seeking support for his policies, approaching him secretly during a visit by the Indian Prime Minister and his daughter, Indira, to the Angkor temples. Nehru apparently took the measure of this intriguer immediately. He advised Son Ngoc Thanh to forget his differences with me and cooperate in the interests of national unity. Thanh replied with a diatribe against me. Among the reproaches was that I was ‘anti-American’ which did not impress Nehru, who informed me of the whole affair.⁵⁵

Besides irritating Sihanouk, the Khmer Serei were not able to pose serious threats to Sihanouk’s regime, although their activities did negatively affect Cambodian-Thai relations to some extent. In addition to these resistance movements, Cambodian dissidents within Sihanouk’s government also influenced Cambodian-Thai relations in the years to come. This episode was referred to by Sihanouk as the “Bangkok Plot.”

Sam Sary had been a close associate and an advisor to Prince Sihanouk during the first half of the 1950s. He was an important figure in the Cambodian delegation to the Geneva Conference in 1954, and a driving force in the formation of Sihanouk’s *Sangkum Reastr Niyum* Party and its electoral campaign in 1955.⁵⁶ In 1956, however, he paid a three-month visit to the U.S. under a leader grant. After his return, Sary began to demonstrate a pro-Western position, which resulted in his cooling relations

⁵⁴ Robert L. Turkoly-Joczik, “Cambodia’s Khmer Serei Movement,” p. 5.

⁵⁵ Norodom Sihanouk, “Why Did I Quit the Throne in 1955?” in Julio A. Jeldres, *Shadow over Angkor*, p. 58.

⁵⁶ David Chandler, *The Tragedy of Cambodian History*, p. 99.

with the Prince. In fact, Sary was described by the U.S. Department of State as “the staunchest friend of the United States in Cambodia.”⁵⁷ Perhaps because of his stance and Sihanouk’s desire to have him leave Cambodia’s political stage, Sary was eventually appointed Cambodia’s ambassador to London in late 1957. Six months following a scandal in London in which Sam Sary allegedly beat Iv Eng Seng (a family governess and also one of Sam Sary’s mistresses) and the bad publicity that ensued, he was recalled to Cambodia in 1958. Sam Rainsy (Sam Sary’s son and the current opposition leader), however, recently suggested that “Sam Sary accepted public responsibility for the incident” while in fact it was his “long-suffering mother who caused the injuries.”⁵⁸ He also wrote that:

I will never know for sure exactly what it was that caused the decline in relations between Sihanouk and my father. The problem could have started before he was posted as ambassador to London. Part of it was the lack of any pretense of democracy, which my father strongly favored. Sam Sary wanted a parliamentary democracy along British lines. Another part of it was that Sihanouk was moving away from the principle of independence for which Sam Sary had fought at Geneva. My father was opposed to any accommodation with the communists of the Soviet Union, China, or North Vietnam.⁵⁹

Despite being warned by Queen Kossamak (Sihanouk’s mother) not to engage in political activities, Sary decided in November 1958 to publish a newspaper – *Reastrthipodei* (“The Sovereign People”)⁶⁰ – whose “basic stance was that Cambodia needed to develop into a constitutional, democratic monarchy.”⁶¹ He also sought to establish an opposition party, but was unsuccessful as Sihanouk failed to reply to his

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 99.

⁵⁸ Sam Rainsy, *We Didn’t Start the Fire: My Struggle for Democracy in Cambodia* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2013), p. 19.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 18.

⁶⁰ Historian David Chandler translated the term as “Democratic People.”

⁶¹ Sam Rainsy, *We Didn’t Start the Fire*, p. 20.

request.⁶² On November 28, 1958, Cambodia suspended its diplomatic relations with Thailand.⁶³ In January 1959, the prince openly, and most probably rightly, accused Thai premier Sarit Thanarat of setting in motion the “Bangkok Plot” to overthrow him and change Cambodia’s foreign policy to align with the United States. Not long after that, Sam Sary fled (perhaps to South Vietnam first, and later)⁶⁴ to Bangkok, where he stayed until he disappeared in 1962 without making much political headway or becoming a serious threat to Sihanouk’s regime.⁶⁵ Historian David Chandler suggested that Sam Sary could have probably been murdered by his own foreign backers, while others (including Sam Sary’s relatives) had thought that Sihanouk had been responsible for his death. His son Sam Rainsy, however, remarked that:

Father was not, as we long believed, killed on the orders of Sihanouk, however. The truth came to light as the result of painstaking research carried out by my brother Emmarith. He uncovered documents and witnesses that proved that the person who ordered his death was Son Ngoc Thanh. He had intercepted letters from Sam Sary to Sihanouk in which my father had sought reconciliation. Had this come about, it would have been likely to provoke a split within the Khmer Serei movement. Sam Sary died in the southern Lao province of Pakse in late 1962 or early 1963, shot in the back at the age of forty-three. Several witnesses confirmed this version of events.⁶⁶

⁶² In his later writing recalling the anti-monarchy and pro-Western leaflets distributed at the same time that Sam Sary asked to open an opposition party, Sihanouk claimed that: “One could see the hands of Son Ngoc Thanh everywhere. The real aim was obviously not to form a political party but to sow confusion.” See Norodom Sihanouk and Wilfred Burchett, *My War with the CIA: Cambodia’s Fight for Survival* (London: Penguin Books Inc., 1973), p. 106.

⁶³ Puy Kea, *Cambodian Governments from 1945 to 2010*, p. 57.

⁶⁴ Sam Rainsy recently wrote: “I only know what happened next because of the memories of my brother. The Black Chrysler [which Sam Sary set off with] crossed the Mekong via the Monivong Bridge, and went about twelve kilometers beyond Chbar Ampeuv Village [on National Road No. 1 to Vietnam]. There they stopped and got out of the car. Sam Sary [...] switched to a black South Vietnamese diplomatic corps vehicle.” See Sam Rainsy, *We Didn’t Start the Fire*, p. 20.

⁶⁵ David Chandler, *The Tragedy of Cambodian History*, pp. 100-101; and Milton Osborne, *Sihanouk: Prince of Light, Prince of Darkness* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994), pp. 107-09.

⁶⁶ Sam Rainsy, *We Didn’t Start the Fire*, p. 21.

The split between Sam Sary and Son Ngoc Thanh could have resulted from their different opinions regarding Cambodia's future as an alternative to the one under Sihanouk. As Sam Rainsy reckoned:

In terms of ideology, my father was sympathetic to Son Ngoc Thanh, the Khmer Serei leader who provided our envelope stuffed with money in Saigon. But Sam Sary did not support his armed struggle. He wanted Cambodia's monarchy to be reformed rather than destroyed. Son Ngoc Thanh likely planned to reward his Thai and [South] Vietnamese allies with territory taken from Cambodia. This would have anathema to the man who saw himself as having stood firm to protect Cambodia's sovereignty when negotiating independence at Geneva.⁶⁷

Though not directly implicated in the "Bangkok Plot," another Cambodian dissident – Dap Chhuon – also opposed Sihanouk's seemingly pro-communist foreign policy and maintained cordial relations with Thailand and South Vietnam. Dap Chhuon had been a former Khmer Issarak who later joined Sihanouk's government in 1949. He was granted total control as the governor of Siem Reap and military commander of the northwest, where he was to be known as "Chhuon Mchul Pich" (*Chhuon the Diamond Needle*). Throughout his career in the Cambodian government during the 1950s, Chhuon was rather friendly with the authorities in Bangkok and their South Vietnamese and American allies.⁶⁸ By 1957, when Chhuon became the minister of interior, he summoned members of the National Assembly to his residence in Phnom Penh to inform them of his disapproval of Sihanouk's "pro-Communist" foreign policy.⁶⁹ According to historian David Chandler, by 1959, Dap Chhuon was under pressure from Bangkok to support General Sarit Thanarat who would take over power

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ David Chandler, *The Tragedy of Cambodian History*, p. 101.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

from Phibulsongkram in Thailand, and also to refrain from sending Cambodian troops to attack Thai forces occupying Preah Vihear.⁷⁰ With support from South Vietnam and the CIA, Dap Chhuon eventually planned to stage a coup against Sihanouk; the coup failed and he was eventually arrested and executed. With Sam Sary out of the country and Dap Chhuon already dead in 1959, pro-Thai/U.S. dissidents within Sihanouk's regime were eliminated. But the existence of the "Bangkok Plot" as perceived by Sihanouk would have a strong impact on his foreign policy toward Thailand. Sihanouk now believed more strongly than ever that, in addition to being irredentist about its territorial claims, Thailand (together with its U.S. and South Vietnamese allies) could not be trusted because it was also interested in toppling his regime by supporting dissidents such as Son Ngoc Thanh, Sam Sary, and Dap Chhuon. Although Cambodia restored relations with Thailand in February 1959 through United Nations mediation, the two countries remained antagonistic toward one another, and on October 23, 1961, Cambodia once again broke off relationships with Thailand.⁷¹

2.6. Post-1962: the prince "turned left"

The June 1962 ICJ's ruling over Preah Vihear temple in favor of Cambodia certainly dealt a further blow to the already strained Cambodian-Thai relationship. Yet, it was Cambodia's internal power struggle and meddling from Thailand (and its allies, namely South Vietnam and the U.S.) which had a major impact on Sihanouk's foreign

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 102.

⁷¹ Puy Kea, *Cambodian Governments from 1945 to 2010*, p. 64.

policy decisions: his closer alignment with communist regimes (i.e. People's Republic of China, and eventually, North Vietnam), and disentanglement from the U.S. bloc.

A *realist* analysis would consider Cambodia's shift of foreign policy to alignment with the communist bloc a result of *realpolitik* calculation, or an act of balance of power based on materialist (i.e. arms power) calculation. For realists, it matters little who is in power in the country, because the state would behave rationally by aligning itself with different allies to maximize its national interests. Some constructivists (who are keen on emphasizing nationalism and historical animosity between Cambodia and Thailand), on the other hand, would consider Cambodia's fallout with Thailand a product of nationalist politics on both sides of the two states instead. There is of course a partial truth in both arguments. But a more nuanced approach proposed by the "social conflict" analysis is more useful in helping us understand the shift of Cambodia's foreign policy after 1962. Both domestic and regional factors contributed to this shift.

It should be emphasized here again that it was Prince Sihanouk who was ruling in Cambodia and had almost absolute control over the choice of Cambodia's foreign policy in this period. For Sihanouk, Thailand appeared to be an irredentist state over the border issue, and similar to how Siamese kings had done in the past, the new Thai rulers interfered in Cambodia's domestic politics, and in this case, by supporting opponents of Sihanouk such as the Khmer Issarak, Son Ngoc Thanh, Sam Sary, and Dap Chhuon. These series of events led Sihanouk to conclude that he was surrounded by domestic and regional enemies, who had the United States as their main backer.

On the economic front, Sihanouk also began to distrust the emerging Chinese and Sino-Cambodian commercial elite who had enjoyed trade relations with their counterparts in Bangkok and Saigon.⁷² Perhaps in an attempt to reduce the rising power of these commercial elite, Sihanouk closed the Thai-Cambodian border. Additionally, he decided to nationalize imports-exports, insurance, and banking trades in December 1963, angering the business elite that had profited from those sectors. A major incident in the banking sector of Cambodia earlier that year had partially prompted Sihanouk to make that decision. Apparently, a Sino-Thai businessman by the name of Somsak Kitpanich had established a successful privately-owned Bank of Phnom Penh. For years, Somsak had accumulated deposits worth over US\$10 million by offering high interest rates, thereby depleting the capital that would have been deposited to the National Bank of Cambodia. After Prince Sihanouk was alerted by the governor of the National Bank about this issue, he ordered an immediate investigation. Somsak, however, had disappeared (probably to Thailand) along with all the deposits even before the investigation could take place. Sihanouk was quick to claim the CIA's involvement in this "plot" to destroy the Cambodian economy.⁷³ He was also concerned that his top military officials were becoming too dependent on U.S. military aid, which could eventually allow them to challenge his leadership. And as Stephen Hoadley remarked: "The prince also hinted that the Central Intelligence Agency was providing funds to the Khmer Serai (*sic*), an ultra-nationalist movement dedicated to overthrowing the Sihanouk regime."⁷⁴ By 1963, Sihanouk refused to

⁷² David Chandler, *The Tragedy*, p. 131.

⁷³ Punnee Soonthornpoch, *From Freedom to Hell: A History of Foreign Interventions in Cambodian Politics and Wars* (New York: Vantage Press, 2005), pp. 111-112.

⁷⁴ J. Stephen Hoadley, *Soldiers and Politics in Southeast Asia*, p. 132.

receive aid from the United States, and by April 1965, he broke relations altogether.⁷⁵

In short, Sihanouk perceived Thailand and the U.S. as threats to his power grip in Cambodia, and by extension, to the whole country itself.

In December 1963, Thai premier Sarit Thanarat passed away and was succeeded by Thanom Kittikachorn, who had assisted Sarit Thanarat to power through a *coup d'état* in 1958. Thanom continued the military rule in Thailand without a constitution, Parliament, or political parties, until his government was elected in a national election in 1969.⁷⁶ This entailed that there was no remarkable change in Thailand's foreign policy. Insofar as Thailand's foreign policy toward Cambodia was concerned, Thailand continued to be antagonistic toward Sihanouk's rule in Cambodia, and vice versa.

Cambodia and Thailand had already experienced a deteriorating relationship since the ICJ's ruling over Preah Vihear in favor of Cambodia in June 1962. In 1965, however, more hostilities sprang up. While Thailand accused Cambodia of providing sanctuary for the communist Vietnamese and violating Thai territory, the latter accused the former of harboring the ambition to seize Preah Vihear temple and supporting the Khmer Serei forces.⁷⁷ Since early 1965, the Khmer Serei, with the support of the Bangkok government, openly declared war on Sihanouk.⁷⁸ By the end of that year, some members of the U.S. army's Special Forces Group from Okinawa (requested by

⁷⁵ Kenton Clymer, *The United States and Cambodia, 1969-2000: A Troubled Relationship* (London & New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), p. 3.

⁷⁶ Corrine Phuangkasem, *Thailand's Foreign Relations, 1964-80* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1984), p. 3.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁷⁸ Prunee Soonthornpoch, *From Freedom to Hell: A History of Foreign Interventions in Cambodian Politics and Wars* (New York: Vantage Press, Inc., 2005), p. 122.

Thailand to train its Communist Suppression Operations Command Unit) were dispatched to provide training support to the Khmer Serei in the jungle of Dangrek mountain range along the Cambodian-Thai border.⁷⁹ On April 3, 1966, Thai forces made a surprise attack on a handful of Cambodian troops and occupied the Preah Vihear temple, only to be dispelled by Cambodian forces three days later.⁸⁰ Because of the ensuing accusations and counter-accusations, Thailand and Cambodia brought the issue to the United Nations in 1966 and 1969, respectively.⁸¹

In August 1966, in an attempt to mediate the conflict, United Nations Secretary-General U Thant appointed a Swedish diplomat, Mr. Hebert de Ribbing, to examine the situation and bring about means of negotiation for the two countries. Ribbing, however, left in February 1968 after two years of fruitless efforts realizing the deep-seated antagonisms between the Thai and Cambodian governments.⁸² Prunee Soonthornpoch also claimed that at the same time, there were frequent clashes between the Khmer Serei and Sihanouk's forces, which understandably made any conciliation of relations between Thailand and Cambodia difficult.⁸³

While Sihanouk was disengaging Cambodia from the U.S. and its allies (namely, Thailand and South Vietnam), his relations with China was increasingly tightened. His approach to foreign policy should not be simply viewed as an act of balance of power in the realist sense. Although Sihanouk's rapprochement with China was in

⁷⁹ Prunee Soonthornpoch, *From Freedom to Hell*, p. 122.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Corrine Phuangkasem, *Thailand's Foreign Relations*, p. 26.

⁸² Leslie Fielding, *Before the Killing Fields: Witness to Cambodia and the Vietnam War* (New York: I. B. Tauris & Co Ltd., 2008), p. 132.

⁸³ See Prunee Soonthornpoch, *From Freedom to Hell*, p. 122.

part to seek alternative support to American aid (with a much reduced amount),⁸⁴ his cordial relations with China stemmed more from the fact that China, unlike the U.S., did not appear to be meddling in Cambodia's domestic affairs. In fact, as Leslie Fielding (former British Ambassador to Cambodia between 1964 and 1966) wrote:

In a joint statement made by the Prime Ministers of Cambodia and China in August 1958, Chou En-lai specifically advised the Chinese residing in Cambodia to refrain from all political activity in their host country. Thereafter, the Chinese Government made no apparent effort to intervene on behalf of proscribed Cambodian communists, or to mitigate the damage to the commercial ascendancy of Chinese merchants inflicted by Prince Sihanouk in his various measures of economic nationalisation and so-called reform.⁸⁵

Sihanouk later declared that China was “the synonym for Cambodia's survival with independence, peace, and territorial integrity.” With South Vietnam and Thailand in mind, he cautioned: “If we move away from China we will be devoured by the vultures, which are the eternal swallows of Khmer territory.”⁸⁶ By 1966, however, things began to change. Prince Sihanouk had a second thought about his relations with China after the Chinese Cultural Revolution started to create some noticeable political impacts in Cambodia. In August that year, Mao buttons and the “Little Red Books” of Mao Tse-tung appeared in Phnom Penh. Moreover, following the Chinese-Soviet dispute, Chinese students from Chinese schools in Phnom Penh took to the

⁸⁴ Chinese aid was provided to Cambodia mostly in the form of equipment, factories, raw materials, manufactured goods, and technical assistance, which altogether had totaled to less than US\$100 million compared to over US\$400 offered by the US in that same period. On China's aid to Cambodia, see Alain-Gerard Marson, “China's Aid to Cambodia,” *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 42, No. 2 (1969): pp. 189-98.

⁸⁵ Leslie Fielding, *Before the Killing Fields*, p. 152.

⁸⁶ Cited in Nayan Chanda, *Brother Enemy: The War after the War* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1986), p. 109.

streets on January 31, 1967 to demonstrate against the Soviet Embassy, alarming the Cambodian government of their political activities.⁸⁷

Prince Sihanouk's concern about communism was heightened in early March 1967, when a rebellion in Samlaut (Battambang Province) broke out against the state's forced purchases of paddy rice from farmers with low prices compared to black market prices. Prince Sihanouk suspected the communists' role behind the uprising and sent government forces under General Lon Nol to put down the rebellion. Sihanouk claimed years later that he had "read somewhere that ten thousand" people had been killed in the campaign.⁸⁸ Following the uprising, high school and university students protested to demand the removal of Lon Nol and the army from Battambang.⁸⁹ The political consequence after the Samlaut uprising was Sihanouk's decision to turn against the leftists in Cambodia, some of whom (such as Khieu Samphan, Hou Nim and Hou Yuon) had been allowed to work in his government since 1963. By late April 1967, fearing with good reason for their lives, all the leftists had slipped away to join their communist colleagues in the *marquis*.⁹⁰

As historian David Chandler noted, Sihanouk's tactics in domestic politics and foreign policy after the Samlaut uprising were "to maintain his attacks on the Left, to attempt to hold onto the middle ground, and to seek to renew diplomatic relations with the United States in the hope of reinstating economic and military aid." But as he

⁸⁷ For detailed discussion on the impact of the Chinese Cultural Revolution in Cambodia, see Abdulgaffar Peang-Meth, "Cambodia and the United Nations: Comparative Foreign Policies under Four Regimes (Volumes I and II)" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1980), pp. 215-216.

⁸⁸ Cited in David Chandler, *A History of Cambodia* 4th ed., p. 245.

⁸⁹ Milton Osborne, *Sihanouk: Prince of Light, Prince of Darkness*, p. 191.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

further argued, “By then, however, most U.S. policymakers perceived Cambodia as a side issue to their country’s involvement in Vietnam and wanted relations with Sihanouk only on their terms.”⁹¹ As far as relations with Thailand were concerned, no rapprochement could be made until the end of Sihanouk’s rule in 1970.

What should be mentioned here is the fact that toward the end of the 1960s, Prince Sihanouk was beginning to lose his grip on power in Cambodia. The Cambodian right-wing elite and the army had resented the fact that Sihanouk broke diplomatic ties with the U.S., refused to receive American military aid, and nationalized the economy, which had all affected their interests. As the country’s economy continued to deteriorate, university graduates in the city who could not find jobs were also disgruntled. By March 1970, Sihanouk was deposed from power while he was out of the country in a coup led by Lon Nol and Sarik Matak. Starting from March 1970, Cambodia and Thailand would experience a new phase of relationship as there was a change of regime in Phnom Penh. This new relationship is discussed in the next chapter.

2.7. Conclusion

After Thailand recognized Cambodia as an autonomous state within the French Union in 1950, diplomatic relations between the two countries started off warmly, with Thailand providing support to Cambodia through provision of scholarships and trainings to Cambodian students and civil servants. Relations turned sour in early

⁹¹ David Chandler, *A History of Cambodia*, p. 246.

1954 after Thailand captured Preah Vihear temple, an act Cambodia considered to be a violation of her sovereignty. Throughout the second half of the 1950s, the two countries exchanged bitter accusations and counter-accusations about violations of their sovereignty. Diplomatic relations were suspended twice, in 1958 and 1961, and remained strained until the end of the Prince Sihanouk's rule in 1970.

The “social conflict” analysis model offers a useful approach to analyze Cambodia-Thailand relations between 1950 and 1970 as discussed in this chapter. Rather than thinking of Cambodia's antagonistic relations with Thailand in this period as a result of Cambodia's securitizing against Thai irredentism (or vice versa) based on rationalization of unified national interests, one should see the two nations' foreign relations as an extension of domestic power struggles (especially in Cambodia in this case), as well as a result of the differences of ideological orientation between these competing forces locally and between the leaders of Cambodia and Thailand at the time. As Lee Jones suggested, “Different societal groups always evaluate potential security issues in relation to their own interests, ideologies, and strategies [...] One social group may perceive and discursively identify something as ‘threatening’, while others may be indifferent or even view the issue positively.”⁹²

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, in addition to the border conflict, Prince Sihanouk also greatly resented Thailand's support of Khmer resistance groups, as well as other individual Cambodian dissidents (such as Sam Sary and Dap Chhuon) against his rule. Prince Sihanouk strongly believed that the best foreign policy choice for

⁹² Lee Jones, “Beyond Securitization: Explaining the Scope of Security Policy in Southeast Asia,” *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* (2011): p. 4.

Cambodia was non-alignment and neutrality in the Cold War conflict. At first, he was open to all sides of the rival camps as long as they did not violate Cambodia's sovereignty and challenge his leadership. After perceiving Cambodia's neighbors, namely Thailand and South Vietnam, as aggressors toward Cambodia and meddling in her political affairs by supporting the Cambodian dissidents against him, Sihanouk broke off relations with the two countries, as well as with the United States. He turned to China as an alternative ally, although by 1967, he also attempted (but failed) to reverse his foreign policy after feeling a rising political threat to his rule from the local communists.

The Thai military leaders, on the other hand, perceived themselves as guardians of the Thai national interest, protecting what they considered Thailand's sovereignty, and stood firmly against the penetration of local and regional communists. Such a foreign policy certainly had the benefit of receiving much aid from the United States. Thailand pursued a hostile foreign policy toward Cambodia under Sihanouk as they considered his neutralist stance as a mere façade for alliance with the communists. At the same time, Thailand also provided support to Cambodian dissidents whom they viewed as sharing the same pro-U.S. foreign policy if they were in power in Cambodia. As Thailand was ruled by anti-communist military leaders, while Cambodia was under Sihanouk, the foreign policy choices by both sides did not have much room for reconciliation.

It is true that the Preah Vihear conflict was a major factor in the two countries' strained relations. Yet, it would be misleading to view the conflict simply as between

Thailand and Cambodia without looking at the domestic struggles in both countries, which also affected their foreign policy choices. Had the Democrats or Son Ngoc Thai held power in Cambodia, it was highly plausible that relations between Cambodia and Thailand would be warmer, given their shared pro-U.S. and anti-communist stance. This is especially evident after 1970, when relations between the Khmer Republic and Thailand became amicable again, as will be shown in the next chapter.

Furthermore, although many scholars are quick to point to historical animosity and nationalist antagonism between Cambodia and Thailand during this period, it should again be viewed within the context of domestic power struggles and divergence of ideology and interests between leaders in Phnom Penh and Bangkok. Rather than being a factor that constantly affects Cambodia-Thailand relations, the exchange of nationalist rhetoric only served to bolster political support and legitimacy at home when the governments of both states do not share mutual interests and ideology. The issue of nationalism virtually disappeared when Prince Sihanouk was ousted from power and replaced by the pro-U.S. elite in Cambodia. This shall be the topic of discussion in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: Khmer Republic Period (1970-1975)

3.1. Introduction

This chapter examines the diplomatic relations between Cambodia and Thailand between 1970 and 1975, a period in which Cambodia became a pro-U.S. republic, while Thailand was undergoing political transition from military to civilian rule. As argued throughout this dissertation, the competing domestic political forces in both Cambodia and Thailand were instrumental in influencing the relations between the two countries. The shift from Sihanouk's "neutralist" foreign policy to a pro-U.S. one under the Khmer Republic meant that Cambodia was on more positive terms with the pro-U.S. military government in Thailand now. However, the October 1973 mass protests and challenges to Thailand's military leadership, which paved the way for a civilian government with neutralist tendencies, eventually cooled the two countries' relationship somewhat which remained so until the fall of the Khmer Republic in April 1975. Certainly, these domestic factors should also be viewed within the context of the U.S.'s subsequent withdrawal from the region as well.

The chapter begins by looking at the social, economic, and political factors in Cambodia that gave rise to the coup against Prince Sihanouk in March 1970 (and the ensuing civil war), as well as a shift in foreign policy undertaken by the new regime in pursuing a cooperative relationship with Thailand from 1970 to 1973. Next, it discusses the social and political factors that brought about a change from military to civilian governments in Thailand, and why such changes subsequently negatively affected Thailand's relationship with Cambodia from 1973 to 1975. In doing so, the

different ideologies, strategies, and interests of competing societal forces operating in both countries are analyzed and discussed within the framework of the “social conflict” analysis, so as to help us understand the continuing fluctuations of Cambodian-Thai diplomatic relations in this period.

3.2. The March 1970 coup and the civil war in Cambodia

On March 18, 1970, the Cambodian National Assembly voted unanimously (92-0) to oust Prince Sihanouk while he was abroad and sentenced him to death in absentia on the charges of high treason (by allowing Vietnamese communist armed forces to use Cambodian territory), constantly violating the national Constitution (by creating a despotic regime), embezzlement of state funds for personal and relatives' ends, systematic encouragement of corruption, and injuring national prestige and dignity through a fluctuating policy contrary to Cambodia's neutrality.¹ The coup d'état was carried out by General Lon Nol and Prince Sisowath Sirikmatak (Sihanouk's cousin), the former of the two had hitherto been a trusted man of Prince Sihanouk. Since then, Sihanouk had maintained that the coup was a U.S. conspiracy to topple him from power. He explicitly condemned the U.S. involvement in the coup in his 1972 book *My War with the CIA*. Although there seems to be no evidence thus far to suggest full-scale support from the U.S. government, some scholars point to at least some degree

¹ Abdulgaffar Peang-Meth, “Cambodia and the United Nations: Comparative Foreign Policies under Four Regimes (Volumes I and II)” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1980), pp. 293-294; and Bernard K. Gordon and Kathryn Young, “The Khmer Republic: That Was the Cambodia That Was,” *Asian Survey*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (Jan., 1971): p. 33.

of involvement from U.S. military intelligence agents.² On the other hand, while it is reasonable to assume that the U.S. must have hoped and strived for a regime change in Cambodia more sympathetic to its containment policy, the driving factors that prompted the coup were by and large of domestic origin.

Toward the end of the 1960s, Cambodia was undergoing noticeable social and political changes. During the 1960s, almost 10 universities were established in Cambodia (the first one was the Buddhist University founded in 1954 after Cambodia achieved independence from France).³ The total student enrollment in higher education increased significantly from only 347 in 1953 to 10,800 in 1967.⁴ As discussed in the previous chapter, in mid-1965, Prince Sihanouk had decided to nationalize Cambodia's economy to counter the rising influence of the right-wing business elite. An effect of such measures was the stagnant growth of the economy that was not able to absorb a rising number of unemployed university graduates. In the capital, Phnom Penh, the sentiment of disgruntlement could be felt the most. Elizabeth Becker (then a reporter for *The Washington Post*) posited that:

As Thailand boomed with business and U.S. war-related aid [during the second half of the 1960s], Cambodia was growing at less than 5 percent each year. To the country's small-business community, the elite and the middle class of Phnom Penh, this was considered a travesty. They, too, were key players in the 1970 coup.⁵

² For an overview of theories proposed by observers and scholars on the possible U.S. involvement in the coup, see Kenton Clymer, *The United States and Cambodia, 1969-2000: A Troubled Relationship* (London & New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), pp. 21-24.

³ Phirom Leng, "Students' Perceptions toward Private Sector Higher Education in Cambodia," (MA thesis, Ohio University, 2010), p. 20.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Elizabeth Becker, *When the War Was Over: Cambodia and the Khmer Rouge Revolution* (New York: PublicAffairs, 1998), p. 11.

At the same time, exports of rubber and rice also fell, while indebted and landless farmers migrated to the city which could no longer provide sufficient jobs and services to its residents.⁶ More importantly, right-wing politicians and the military officers who had been deprived of U.S. military aid since the mid-1960s were becoming increasingly intolerant of the presence of some 60,000 Vietnamese communist troops in Cambodia's territory secretly allowed by Sihanouk.⁷ Such sentiment was also shared by nationalists and students in the capital. On March 11, 1970, students' demonstrations in front of North Vietnam's and the South Vietnam Provisional Government's (Vietcong's) embassies – with tacit approval of the Phnom Penh authority – turned violent. After hearing this news in France, Sihanouk was apparently enraged and wished to punish the leaders in Phnom Penh. Fearing for their safety upon his return, Lon Nol and Sirik Matak were more convinced that the coup was imperative.⁸

Five days before the coup, on March 13, Lon Nol had delivered what many considered an unrealistic ultimatum ordering all the communist Vietnamese troops to

⁶ Milton Osborne, *Sihanouk: Prince of Light, Prince of Darkness* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994), p. 204.

⁷ The estimate of the Vietnamese communist troop presence in Cambodia was briefed to U.S. President Richard Nixon by General Alexander Haig after his tour in South Vietnam in January 1970. Of the total number, about half of the troops were scattered along the Cambodian-Vietnamese border facing South Vietnam's Mekong River Delta provinces. See Punnee Soonthornpoot, *From Freedom to Hell: A History of Foreign Interventions in Cambodian Politics and Wars* (New York: Vantage Press, Inc., 2005), p. 175.

⁸ For historical accounts on the coup, see David Chandler, *The Tragedy of Cambodian History: Politics, War and Revolutions since 1945* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), pp. 197-199; Milton Osborne, *Sihanouk*, pp. 209-214; Justin J. Corfield, *Khmers Stand Up!: A History of the Cambodian Government 1970-1975* (Melbourne, Australia: Monash University, 1994); and Ben Kiernan, *How Pol Pot Came to Power: Colonialism, Nationalism, and Communism in Cambodia, 1930-1975*, 2nd edition (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), pp. 297-304. On the constitutionality of the "coup," see discussion by Abdulgaffar Peang-Meth, "Cambodia and the United Nations," pp. 288-292.

leave Cambodia within 48 hours. Not surprisingly, the Vietnamese ignored the call.⁹ In an attempt to support the new government, thousands of young Cambodian people, mainly from the city, volunteered to join the army to drive out the Vietnamese communists from Cambodian territory. Before 1970, according to Stephen Hoadley, “the average enlisted man [in the Cambodian armed forces] was an illiterate youth from the countryside. He was apolitical, individualistic, and pragmatic; he was inspired neither by abstract ideology nor by intense personal ambition.”¹⁰ After March 1970, historian Ben Kiernan suggested that “the Lon Nol army grew from a force of 35,000 to as many as 150,000 by the end of the year [1970], almost entirely as a result of voluntary enlistment.”¹¹ Yet, between April and June 1970, thousands of these volunteers were killed in battles near Phnom Penh. As David Chandler noted, “Battle-hardened after a quarter century of warfare, the Vietnamese found them [the Cambodian youth soldiers] easy targets.”¹²

As more and more Khmer soldiers were killed or wounded, anti-Vietnamese sentiment in Phnom Penh was inflamed. What followed were a series of direct and indirect atrocities on civilian Vietnamese committed by the Lon Nol government. According to Jennifer Berman, “Ethnic Vietnamese fishermen and traders were driven out of Cambodia; thousands of those who remained were massacred, their bodies dumped in the Mekong River. In May 1970, Lon Nol's army rounded up and killed thousands of Vietnamese civilians in and around Phnom Penh.”¹³ In the villages,

⁹ Ibid., p. 389.

¹⁰ J. Stephen Hoadley, *Soldiers and Politics in Southeast Asia*, p. 133.

¹¹ Ben Kiernan, *How Pol Pot Came to Power*, p. 303.

¹² David Chandler, *The Tragedy of Cambodian History*, p. 203.

¹³ Jennifer S. Berman, “No Place like Home: Anti-Vietnamese Discrimination and Nationality in Cambodia,” *California Law Review*, Vol. 84, No. 3 (1996): p. 831.

“Lon Nol continued to fan the flame of anti-Vietnamese antipathy among the Khmer population, leading to further massacres in ethnic Vietnamese villages.”¹⁴ It was estimated that by August 1970, approximately 200,000 ethnic Vietnamese had been forced to leave Cambodia.¹⁵ Yet, as Australian scholar Milton Osborne postulated:

[...] however dreadful the consequences of Sihanouk’s removal, the fact remains that Sirik Matak and Lon Nol acted in response to growing dissatisfaction in the army officer corps and among the urban elite in Phnom Penh who had come to see Sihanouk’s policies as politically and economically ruinous.”¹⁶

The Lon Nol regime was widely supported (at least initially) by right-wing politicians, students and other nationalists in Phnom Penh. Also joining the forces of the new regime were the Khmer Serei, led by Son Ngoc Thanh, who had opposed Sihanouk during the 1950s and 1960s (with support from the U.S. and Thailand).¹⁷ In fact, after the coup, the Lon Nol government pardoned some 500 political prisoners, the majority of whom were Khmer Serei.¹⁸

In the provinces, however, there was generally a different reaction to the coup. In late March, demonstrations against the government in Phnom Penh erupted in Takeo and Kampot provinces but were brutally suppressed. In Kompong Cham, Lon Nil (Lon Nol’s brother) was murdered and cut into pieces by a mob; two assemblymen who were sent to negotiate with the mobs who had burned down the provincial courthouse

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ David A. Ablin, *The Cambodian Agony* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1990), p. xxv.

¹⁶ Milton Osborne, *Sihanouk: Prince of Light, Prince of Darkness* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994), p. 215.

¹⁷ Son Ngoc Thanh returned to Phnom Penh, and on June 17, 1970, he officially became an “adviser to the head of government.” See Ben Kiernan, *How Pol Pot Came to Power*, p. 303.

¹⁸ Country Listing (December 1987), “Cambodia: The Second Indochina War, 1954-75,” <http://www.country-data.com/cgi-bin/query/r-2223.html>. Accessed August 2, 2012. The data is based on the Country Studies Series by Federal Research Division of the Library of Congress of the United States.

a day earlier were also killed.¹⁹ Though reluctant at first, on March 23, Prince Sihanouk made a broadcast of declaration of war from Peking (with support from China) encouraging his “children” (i.e. the Cambodian people) to join the resistance forces in fighting against the new Phnom Penh government – to which many responded positively. Sihanouk also formed the Royal Government of National Union of Kampuchea (more commonly known by its French acronym “GRUNK”) in exile in Peking. As some Sihanouk loyalists went into the jungle, the Cambodian communists known as the “Khmer Rouge” were able to gather more strength.²⁰ Besides Sihanouk’s appeal, the intensification of the U.S. bombing over Cambodia targeting the Vietnamese communist sanctuaries following the deposal of Sihanouk also had the effect of driving many Cambodian peasants into joining the Khmer Rouge.²¹ Consequently, the strength of the Khmer Rouge rose dramatically from only about 3,000 in 1970 to more than 30,000 in 1973.²²

Albeit an over-simplification for urban-rural divide, the civil war during the first half of the 1970s can be considered one between an urban-based (mainly Phnom Penh)

¹⁹ David Chandler, *The Tragedy of Cambodian History*, p. 202.

²⁰ For instance, Prime Minister Hun Sen of Cambodia claimed that he had left for the jungle to join the Khmer Rouge on April 14, 1970 to fight for the return of Prince Sihanouk without knowing who Pol Pot was. The names he had been familiar with were Prince Sihanouk and his close aide Penn Nouth. See Chhay Sophal, *Hun Sen: Politics and Power in the Khmer History for over 40 Years* (Phnom Penh?: unknown publisher, 2012), p. 21.

²¹ A relatively recent study by Taylor Owen and Ben Kiernan reveals that Cambodia was much more heavily bombed than previously thought (often estimated as over half a million tons). According to the new study, “The still-incomplete database (it has several “dark” periods) reveals that from October 4, 1965, to August 15, 1973, the United States dropped far more ordnance on Cambodia than was previously believed: 2,756,941 tons’ worth, dropped in 230,516 sorties on 113,716 sites. Just over 10 percent of this bombing was indiscriminate, with 3,580 of the sites listed as having “unknown” targets and another 8,238 sites having no target listed at all.” For further discussion, see Taylor Owen and Ben Kiernan, “Bombs over Cambodia,” (2006). Accessible at: <http://walrusmagazine.com/articles/2006.10-history-bombing-cambodia/>. Accessed August 1, 2012.

²² While these are often-cited numbers in various encyclopedias, Mao Tse-Tung and Pol Pot’s biographer Philip Short estimated that by May 1972, the Khmer Rouge army had numbered up to 35,000 men, backed by approximately 100,000 guerrillas. See Philip Short, *Pol Pot: Anatomy of a Nightmare* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, LLC, 2004), p. 228.

right-wing military government under Lon Nol on the one hand, and rural-based resistance groups under the Khmer Rouge command in the name of fighting for Sihanouk (supported also by the Vietnamese communists and China) on the other. A brief explanation of the differences between and within the two major camps is worth pointing out here.

Certainly, the Lon Nol government did not constitute a homogeneous political group. Factions existed within the ruling circle, and struggle for power was particularly visible between Lon Nol, his deputy Sirik Matak, and In Tam (Chairman of the National Assembly), among others.²³ Despite their personal political ambition, however, they were united in their anti-communist Vietnamese sentiment. With the exception of Prince Sirik Matak, many also now favored republicanism. On October 9, 1970, the Khmer Republic was officially proclaimed. Anti-monarchical sentiment also had urban support, especially among progressive students.²⁴ Lon Nol, who would become the first president of the Khmer Republic after winning a rigged election in 1972, was now at the core of this political ideology. Yet, what probably distinguished him from the rest of the Khmer Republic's leaders was his fervent adherence to unorthodox superstitious Buddhist beliefs. For Lon Nol, the Vietnamese communists were not only a threat to Cambodia's territorial integrity, but also to the existence of Buddhism in Cambodia.²⁵ The communists, both Vietnamese and Khmer (i.e. the

²³ For discussion about the internal power struggle within the Khmer Republic leadership from a former insider's perspective, see Ros Chantrabot, *La République Khmère* (Editions L'Harmattan, 1993).

²⁴ For instance, on March 8, 1972, students of the Faculty of Law and Economics "called for future exclusion of royalist members in the following political roles: president, vice-president, Prime Minister, and commander-in-chief in the armed forces," and on March 28, university students again called for "a complete smashing of royal grime." See Sorpong Peou, *Intervention and Change in Cambodia: Towards Democracy?* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2000), p. 48.

²⁵ See Lon Nol, *Neo-Khmerisme* (Phnom Penh: République Khmère, 1970?).

Khmer Rouge), were usually referred to as “*Thmil*”²⁶ – the “infidels” of (the Buddhist) religion who ought to be perished.²⁷ There was certainly discontent with Lon Nol’s leadership within the ruling circle, but as mentioned, the anti-Vietnamese communist presence was the unifying political factor for the Khmer Republic leadership, and despite suffering a stroke in 1971, Lon Nol remained the figurehead of the republic until he left for the U.S. on April 1, 1975 (two weeks before the collapse of the Khmer Republic to the Khmer Rouge).²⁸

Sihanouk, on the other hand, became the nominal figurehead of the resistance forces against the Khmer Republic, symbolically under the umbrella of the Royal Government of National Union of Kampuchea in exile in China. Prince Sihanouk has been considered by many scholars and foreign observers as a true nationalist who had tried his best to keep his country out of war. Historian David Chandler, for instance, justified Sihanouk’s permission for the Vietnamese communists to use Cambodia’s territory during the 1960s as the prince’s calculated move to keep Cambodia amicable with the future victors of the Vietnam War.²⁹ Similarly, Thai political scientist Khien Theeravit opined that “Prince Norodom Sihanouk has been a controversial figure. No matter what else he is, one thing is clear: he is a Kampuchean nationalist. His

²⁶ According to Ian Harris, the term “*thmil*” (which derives from the ethnonym “Tamil”) seems to have entered the Cambodian language through early religious contacts with Sri Lanka and reflects the racial antipathies of some Sri Lankan missionary monks. See Ian Harris, *Cambodian Buddhism: History and Practice* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2005), Chapter 7 fn. no. 22, pp. 283-284.

²⁷ Former *New York Times* and Pulitzer Prize-winner journalist Henry Kamm reported that Lon Nol’s strong belief also found its way to modern warfare: the soldiers were encouraged to wear amulets for protection; Lon Nol also regularly consulted a group of monks on the prophetic status of the country. See Henry Kamm, *Cambodia: Report from A Stricken Land* (New York: Arcade Publishing, Inc., 1998), pp. 102-104.

²⁸ For accounts regarding the final days of the Khmer Republic and the departure of Lon Nol, see Chhang Song, “Inside View: Lon Nol’s Helicopter Exit Ahead of Khmer Rouge,” *The Cambodia Daily* (April 2, 2014). Accessible at: <http://www.cambodiadaily.com/opinion/inside-view-lon-nols-helicopter-exit-ahead-of-khmer-rouge-55630/>.

²⁹ David Chandler, “The Khmer Rouge in a Cold War Context,” *Genocide Education in Cambodia – DC-Cam*, (July 2011): p. 8.

behavior is a product of an insecure nation whose identity was not well respected by surrounding powers.”³⁰ Yet, Theeravit also rightly pointed out that “Sihanouk’s quest for national survival was expressed in a war of nerves with all powers having vested interests in Kampuchea. As a consequence, Sihanouk’s government alienated all friends and at best found only collaborators.”³¹

Theeravit’s statement was a valid analysis for the GRUNK, which was a nominal alliance of convenience of various interest groups and former enemies, comprising Sihanouk’s loyalists (such as GRUNK’s Premier Penn Nouth), non-communist dissidents against the Khmer Republic of Phnom Penh, and the communist Khmer Rouge.³² While Sihanouk needed the Khmer Rouge forces on the ground to avenge the Khmer Republic’s leaders who had deposed him, the Cambodian communists needed the prince’s legitimacy for their troop mobilization efforts. On the ground, the Khmer Rouge were aided (at least initially) by the communist Vietnamese, who also fought the Americans and the Khmer Republican army. The Chinese decided to actively support GRUNK after they failed to persuade Lon Nol to continue allowing the Vietnamese communists to have sanctuaries on Cambodian soil. According to Lieut. Gen. Sak Sutsakhan of the Khmer Republic, China was willing to consider that the “matter between Sihanouk and the Khmer [Republic] government was nothing more than an internal problem,” and that Peking would be willing to overlook personalities involved provided that the Khmer Republic accepted three conditions: i)

³⁰ Khien Theeravit, “Thai-Kampuchean Relations: Problems and Prospects,” *Asian Survey*, Vol. 22, No. 6 (June 1982): p. 565.

³¹ Ibid.

³² For a complete list of GRUNK leaders, see Sak Sutsakhan, “The Khmer Republic at War and the Final Collapse,” *A Report to the Department of the Army, Office of Chief of Military History* (November 1978), p. 180.

permit China to continue to use Cambodian territory to resupply the Vietnamese communists with arms; ii) authorize the Vietnamese communists to establish their bases in Cambodia as before; and iii) continue to support the Vietnamese communists with propaganda.³³

In spite of its members' different long-term goals and political ideologies, the presence of GRUNK played a major role in shaping the foreign policy of the Khmer Republic on the international stage.³⁴

3.3. The Khmer Republic's foreign policy outlook

Although the new leaders in Cambodia could be characterized as right-wing and anti-communist, their immediate concern after the coup was to preserve Cambodia's neutrality. On the day Sihanouk was deposed, President of the National Assembly (now the acting Chief of State) Cheng Heng told the nation:

I have the duty to solemnly declare at this occasion that Cambodia adopts the same political line, that is of independence, neutrality, and territorial integrity, and that Cambodia recognizes and respects all treaties and agreements previously concluded.³⁵

Similarly, two days later, Prime Minister Lon Nol reaffirmed this stance in a national broadcast that Cambodia would:

³³See Sak Sutsakhan, "The Khmer Republic at War and the Final Collapse," p. 15.

³⁴A few days after the proclamation of the Khmer Republic, Sihanouk and his Vietnamese and Chinese allies condemned the republic as "absolutely illegal" and an "American style farce." See National Library of Australia, "Reaction to Establishment of Cambodian Republic" in *Principal Reports from Communist Radio Sources* (October 1970).

³⁵Cited in Abdulgaffar Peang-Meth, "Cambodia and the United Nations," p. 384.

[...] undeviatingly follow the policy of independence, neutrality, and territorial integrity ... In this spirit, we will maintain our friendly relations and co-operation with all countries of the world without distinction of regime or ideology, and – it must be clear – without adhering to any military pact or ideological bloc ...³⁶

In his broadcast speech to the nation in April 1970, Lon Nol further remarked: “because of the gravity of the present situation, it is felt necessary to accept, from now on, all external help, from whatever sources, for the nation’s safety.”³⁷

What differentiated the new Phnom Penh leaders from Sihanouk was their firm opposition to the presence of the Vietnamese communist armed forces in Cambodia’s territory. In addition, the establishment of Sihanouk’s government in exile supported by the People’s Republic of China, had a major impact on the re-orientation of the Khmer Republic’s foreign policy. Accordingly, the Lon Nol regime found a natural ally: the United States. Both Cambodia under Lon Nol and the U.S. wanted to get the Vietnamese communist troops out of Cambodia’s territory. The presence of the Vietnamese communists on Cambodian soil was understandably a strategic disadvantage for the American position in their war against the Vietnamese communists, as the latter could launch attacks from Cambodia on American troops in South Vietnam. Now that a new regime took over power in Cambodia, U.S. President Richard Nixon took the opportunity and ordered attacks on the Vietnamese communist troops inside Cambodian territory. Lon Nol, who had also been kept in the dark about the planned invasion for some time, was later given three options to respond publicly: “He could say that he had requested the action, or that he had been

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Cited in Punnee Soonthornpoch, *From Freedom to Hell*, p. 178.

informed in advance and had no objections, or that he regretted the operation but understood why it was being initiated.”³⁸ Soon afterward, the Cambodian government even publicly expressed its gratitude to the United States by calling the invasion an act of assistance “in the defense of the neutrality of Cambodia, violated by the North Vietnamese.”³⁹

While the U.S. invasion from April to June 1970 might have inflicted some damages to the Vietnamese communists, it also had the effect of pushing the Vietnamese communist troops even further into Cambodia – effectively fueling more fighting in the country.⁴⁰ The U.S. invasion of Cambodia was also met with mixed diplomatic reactions:

In all major European countries there was strong criticism of the American action... In Germany Willie Brandt refused to establish diplomatic relations with the Lon Nol government... The French government was almost palpably hostile. The Scandinavian countries all distanced themselves from the United States. In Yugoslavia, a country favored by the United States because of its split with the Soviet Union, the reaction was especially bitter. Marshall Josip Broz Tito hurriedly recognized Sihanouk’s government in exile... Non-communist countries of East and Southeast Asia were more supportive. The Thais exhibited “near euphoria.” Ferdinand Marcos of the Philippines thought the action was “great, great, great,” though his Foreign Secretary, the eminent Carlos Romulo, was much more reserved. Singapore’s Lee Kuan Yew feared that the United States might be tempted to pull out too quickly. The Malaysian government concluded that the Lon Nol administration served its interests better than Sihanouk and passively favored the American action.⁴¹

³⁸ Kenton Clymer, *The United States and Cambodia, 1969-2000*, p. 28.

³⁹ Cited in Henry Kamm, *Cambodia: Report from A Stricken Land* (New York: Arcade Publishing, Inc., 1998), p. 73.

⁴⁰ In a memorandum from Henry Kissinger to President Nixon dated July 27, 1970, it was reported that “the Communists were badly hurt in Cambodia, that the Chinese will play an increasingly important political role in Communist operations in Cambodia, and that the Soviets are unwilling to help modernize the North Vietnamese forces further.” See David Goldman and Erin Mahan (eds.), *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976* (Vol. VII) (Washington D.C.: Department of State, U.S. Government Printing House, 2010), pp. 9-10.

⁴¹ Kenton Clymer, *The United States and Cambodia, 1969-2000*, pp. 30-31.

In an attempt to promote stability in Southeast Asia, Japan also initiated the Jakarta Conference on Cambodia in mid-May 1970.⁴² Although no communist countries and major neutralist countries (such as India and Burma) accepted the invitation, the Jakarta conference did call for the withdrawal of all foreign forces in Cambodia and respect for Cambodia's territorial integrity and neutrality.⁴³

As more and more countries were divided into two camps, between those who supported the Khmer Republic and those who supported Sihanouk's government in exile, one thing was becoming clearer: the increasing cooperation between the Khmer Republic and the United States and its regional allies – especially Thailand and South Vietnam. By the end of June 1970, the United States and the South Vietnamese had provided nearly 30,000 rifles and sub-machine guns, nearly 9,000,000 rounds of ammunition, and 9,907 radios to Cambodia.⁴⁴ Other countries, including Japan, the Philippines, Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia, and Taiwan provided only small amounts of aid or training to Lon Nol's government.⁴⁵ Thailand was also becoming more actively involved in the Cambodian conflict starting from May 1970. Given the scope and nature of this research, the following discussion will emphasize more on Cambodian-Thai foreign relations from May 1970 until October 1973.

⁴² According to Amiko Nobori, "Japan has had a considerable interest in promoting stability and security in Southeast Asia because the stability and prosperity of this region are clearly related to Japan," as Southeast Asia is a major source of essential raw materials for Japan and a substantial market for Japanese manufactured goods, as well as a strategic route for Japan's oil imports from the Middle East. See Amiko Nobori, "Japan's Southeast Asian Policy in the Post-Vietnam War: The Jakarta Conference, Economic Aid to Indochina Countries, and Diplomatic Normalization with North Vietnam," *G-SEC Working Paper No.21* (Oct. 2007): p. 14.

⁴³ Kenton Clymer, *The United States and Cambodia, 1969-2000*, p. 35.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

3.4. Relations with Thailand (May 1970 – October 1973)

As Cambodia was forging a closer tie with the United States after Sihanouk's deposal, relations with Thailand also improved. Although the Khmer Republic's leaders were not totally indifferent about the border problems with Thailand in the recent past, their prioritized security concern was the presence of the Vietnamese communist troops in Cambodia. At this point, the leaders in both Cambodia and Thailand now shared a common security interest. In May 1970, Thai Deputy Prime Minister Prapass Charusathiera led a goodwill team to Phnom Penh.⁴⁶ Cambodian Foreign Minister Yem Sambaur also went to Bangkok and met with his Thai counterpart Thanat Khoman, who declared that the previous break of diplomatic relations between the two countries "was due to one man" (i.e. Sihanouk), and now that "that man was gone, all objections disappeared."⁴⁷ On May 13, an agreement to reopen diplomatic relations was signed.⁴⁸ In addition, Thailand aided Cambodia by sending military equipment, uniforms and [loaned] war-planes, and also pledged to send troops if necessary.⁴⁹ Writing in November 1970, Thai Brigadier General Manich Jumsai painted a very rosy picture of cooperation between the two countries:

Relations between Thailand and Cambodia become closer and closer.
There are frequent visits between officials at high level. Many

⁴⁶ Corrine Phuangkasem, *Thailand's Foreign Relations, 1964-80*, (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1984), p. 26.

⁴⁷ Manich Jumsai, *History of Thailand & Cambodia: From the Days of Angkor to the Present* (Bangkok: Chalermnit, 1970), p. 219.

⁴⁸ It wasn't until August 30, 1970 that Thai ambassador to Cambodia, Brig. Gen. Chana Samudthavanij, arrived in Phnom Penh for his post. Before that, he had served as the governor of the province of Prajeanburi bordering Cambodia's Battambang Province. See Punnee Soonthornpoch, *From Freedom to Hell*, p. 201 and chapter 16's endnote no. 13, p. 212. The Thai ambassador was later sacked from his post in 1974 after his involvement in a sex and smuggling scandal in Phnom Penh was revealed. See Larry Palmer, "Thailand's Kampuchea Incidents: Territorial Disputes and Armed Confrontation along the Thai-Kampuchea Frontier," *News from Kampuchea* Vol. 1 No. 4 (Oct. 1977): p. 8.

⁴⁹ Manich Jumsai, *History of Thailand & Cambodia*, p. 219.

agreements for closer cooperation follow. Thai fishermen arrested during Sihanouk's time for infringement of territorial waters were released. People from both sides of the frontier can now cross the frontier with safety.⁵⁰

Support from Thailand to the Khmer Republic was what the United States had highly anticipated. Initial assistance in various forms from Thailand, though fell short of the U.S. expectation, was a cooperative gesture toward Lon Nol's government. Early in June 1970, Thailand loaned five T-28 aircraft to the Cambodian air force. Even before receiving assurances from the United States that it would replace any planes lost in the war, Thailand loaned the planes and agreed to train eight Cambodian pilots. Furthermore, the Thais also cooperated in removing several non-flyable Cambodian T-28s to the U.S. air base at Udorn in Thailand for repair at the CIA's Air America facility.⁵¹ The Thai Red Cross also dispatched a team of much needed doctors, nurses, and medical supplies to support their Cambodian counterparts in Phnom Penh.⁵²

Nonetheless, the major shortcoming of Thailand's assistance to the Khmer Republic was the absence of Thai combatant troops in Cambodia. Punnee Soonthornpoch, who had served in the Khmer Republic's Khmer National Armed Forces (FANK),⁵³ wrote: "The only Thai troops present in 1970-1971 were the Thai Army Signal Corps whose main mission was to gather intelligence about the VC/NVA [i.e. Vietcong/North Vietnamese Army] activities, especially in the area adjacent to the Thai/Cambodian border."⁵⁴ And although Thailand helped train Cambodian soldiers inside Thailand and sent armed patrol boats and an army communication unit to Cambodia, no Thai

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Kenton Clymer, *The United States and Cambodia, 1969-2000*, p. 38.

⁵² Punnee Soonthornpoch, *From Freedom to Hell*, p. 201.

⁵³ FANK is the French acronym for Force Armee Nationale Khmer.

⁵⁴ Punnee Soonthornpoch, *From Freedom to Hell*, p. 201.

soldiers were deployed on Cambodian soil.⁵⁵ There were indeed a few reasons for Thailand's lack of commitment on this matter.

One major reason that deterred Thailand from committing its troops inside Cambodia was the lack of financial support from the U.S. Although the Nixon administration was in favor of providing financial support for this operation, the U.S. Congress's push for reduction of U.S. involvement in Indochina presented a major obstacle.⁵⁶ Still, the U.S. government tried to finance Thai troop deployment operations indirectly by channeling funds to Thailand for social programs such as student housing for hill tribes, provision of building materials for schools, water pumps for housing, and food for dependents of Thai counterintelligence troops etc.⁵⁷ Thanks to these options, attention was focused on sending 4,000 to 5,000 Thai troops to western parts of Cambodia, and more to be added in Siem Reap and Phnom Penh later.⁵⁸ The prospect of sending Thai troops into Cambodia, however, deeply divided the Thai government and the larger society. Kenton Clymer noted:

A rare public discussion of the matter at Chulalongkorn University resulted in 3,000 students "filling all seats, packing aisles and sitting on available floor space." Military leaders made the case for armed assistance, while others spoke in opposition. Student reaction was "overwhelmingly opposed to the use of Thai troops." Not surprisingly, when Lon Nol visited Bangkok shortly thereafter [in July 1970], he did not get any specific promises of assistance.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Corrine Phuangkasem, *Thailand's Foreign Relations, 1964-80*, p. 26.

⁵⁶ See Edward A. Kolodziej, "Congress and Foreign Policy: The Nixon Years," *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science*, Vol. 32, No. 1 (1975): pp. 167-179.

⁵⁷ Kenton Clymer, *The United States and Cambodia, 1969-2000*, p. 38.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

Although Thai public opinion at the time did not seem to be in favor of Thailand's military engagement in the Cambodian conflict (and the Vietnam War), it would be misleading to assume that Thailand's reluctance was a direct result of public pressure at this point. In 1970, the military rule was still strong in Thailand, and the impact of public opinion on foreign policy decision-making was minimal at best. In fact, there were also many disagreements within the Thai government itself.

Astri Suhrke suggested that "The Thai government was divided between the diplomatic approach adopted at the Djakarta conference, and direct support to the Cambodian Government as encouraged by the U.S. In the end, the former view prevailed."⁶⁰ As Corrine Phuangkasem rightly argued:

Seeing the change in U.S. policy in Southeast Asia, [Thai] Foreign Minister Thanat preferred to help Cambodia through diplomatic and political means, which was consistent with the Jakarta Declaration which called for the withdrawal of all foreign troops from Cambodia. At first, the [Thai] military leaders were determined to send troops to Cambodia but decided against it because of U.S. reluctance to finance these troops.⁶¹

Moreover, the U.S. disengagement from Southeast Asia also prompted some leaders in the Thai government to adopt the view that national security policy should primarily focus on stabilizing the sensitive border provinces, and that the government should concentrate its resources on Thai territory proper rather than extending itself to operations in neighboring countries.⁶²

⁶⁰ Astri Suhrki, "Smaller-Nation Diplomacy: Thailand's Current Dilemmas," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 11, No. 5 (May, 1971): p. 434.

⁶¹ Corrine Phuangkasem, *Thailand's Foreign Relations, 1964-80*, pp. 26-27.

⁶² Astri Suhrki, "Smaller-Nation Diplomacy," p. 435. Such a view also resonated with that of King Mongkut (r. 1851-1868) expressed a century ago. When pressured to sign the Bowring Treat (1855) which would have essentially made Siam lose its regional imperial status, King Mongkut opined that:

Despite the absence of troops deployed on Cambodian soil, Thailand was still a significant supporter of the Khmer Republic militarily – at least until October 1973. Based on the U.S. Department of State's records, historian Clymer provided the following figures:

[...] Thailand provided more assistance to the Lon Nol government than any other Asian country (except for South Vietnam). The Thais trained thousands of raw Cambodian recruits; provided at least 361 technical advisers (including a radio liaison team stationed in Phnom Penh), nine patrol boats, and clothing and equipment kits for 50,000 soldiers; with American approval, they transferred American-supplied military equipment to the Cambodian armed forces. They also conducted reconnaissance flights over Cambodia and, after the Americans withdrew their troops, flew combat missions in direct support of Cambodia troops.⁶³

As Khien Theeravit noted, "To remain in power, Lon Nol relied heavily on United States and its Thai neighbor on the west. The regime's lifeline depended on the supply lines from Thailand (*sic*)."⁶⁴ As a result, diplomatic relations between the Khmer Republic and the military government of Thailand during this period was by and large cooperative. Chhang Song, a former Minister of Information of the Khmer Republic in 1974, described the official media relations between the two countries as "very good, very close." He further remarked that "I do not recall of any bad incident and I do not think there was any bad press story [in Cambodia] regarding Thailand."⁶⁵ The

"It is sufficient for us to keep ourselves within our house and home; it may be necessary for us to forgo some of our former power and influence." Cited in Nicholas Tarling, "The Establishment of the Colonial Regimes" in *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia* Volume 2 (Singapore: Kin Keong Printing Co., 1992), p. 67.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 39. See also U.S. Embassy Bangkok to SS, 7 August 1970, Tel. 9931, RG 59, SNF 1970-73, Box 2155K, folder POL 27 CAMB-KHMER 8/1/70, NAIH.

⁶⁴ Khien Theeravit, "Thai-Kampuchean Relations: Problems and Prospects," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 22, No. 6 (June 1982): p. 566.

⁶⁵ E-mail interview with the author, August 30, 2011. According to Larry Palmer, however, there was bitter commentary by the underground press at the time on the apparent Thai hegemony over Battambang Province in western Cambodia. See ["Chronic Disease of Battambang Province"] in Chen Udom, *et al.*, *Prachum Pritikar* (Phnom Penh, 1974), pp. 64-47.

border incidents, accusations and counter-accusations that had damaged relations between the two countries during the 1950s and 1960s (when Prince Sihanouk was in power) were largely absent in this period – at least from the public rhetoric and official relations.

3.5. Relations with Thailand (October 1973 – April 1975)

Sometime in 1973 (presumably before October), when his book *My War with the CIA* was published, Prince Sihanouk (exiled in Peking) predicted the following scenario:

What our future relations with Thailand will be depends on how things evolve. If Thailand takes the fatal step of attacking us, with the help of the Thai people and our Vietnamese and Laotian comrades-in-arms, we will strike back. We will win. The Thai military dictatorships – no matter who is in power at the time – will be overthrown and a new era of friendship between our two countries will be inaugurated.⁶⁶

His prediction would turn out to be largely accurate. By October 1973, mass protests led by hundreds of thousands of students in Bangkok had toppled the military government of Thanom Kittikachorn, which was later replaced by a civilian government under Kukrit Pramoj. Once the new government took over power in Thailand, its stance toward the Khmer Republic also changed, resulting in a slowdown in the two countries' cooperation. What was not accurate about Sihanouk's assessment of the situation was his belief that he was in control of the resistance movements in Cambodia against the Khmer Republic.

⁶⁶ Norodom Sihanouk and Wilfred Burchett, *My War with the CIA: Cambodia's Fight for Survival* (London: Penguin Books Inc., 1973), pp. 251-252.

Before discussing the shift of the Cambodian-Thai relationship after October 1973, it is imperative to examine the social and political changes happening in both countries prior to that, especially in the case of Thailand, where remarkable domestic disgruntlement had the effect of stripping the power from the ruling military government.

3.5.1. The turmoil in the Khmer Republic

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, when Prince Sihanouk was deposed in March 1970, the new government in Phnom Penh initially had strong urban support but not in the countryside, where many people still revered Prince Sihanouk. In addition to Sihanouk's appeal to the people to fight Lon Nol's government, many Cambodians also joined the Khmer Rouge (without necessarily adhering to communist ideology) after the U.S. intensified its B-52 bombing operations to destroy Vietnamese communist sanctuaries in Cambodia.⁶⁷ Therefore, between 1970 and 1973, Lon Nol's army had to fight both the local Khmer Rouge and the Vietnamese communists on Cambodian soil.

In his book *A Short History of Cambodia*, Australian historian John Tully wrote a chapter on "The doomed Republic, 1970-75."⁶⁸ Most writers on the Khmer Republic would by and large agree with his labeling of this regime. Despite economic and

⁶⁷ Historian John Tully provided the following figures: "Estimates of the total death toll from bombing vary from 150 000 to the US historian Chalmers Johnson's perhaps inflated estimate of 750 000. A Finnish Commission of Inquiry estimated 600 000 directly war-related deaths between 1970 and April 1975, although in truth the exact numbers will probably never be known." See John A. Tully, *A Short History of Cambodia: From Empire to Survival* (Crows Nest, New South Wales: Allen & Unwin, 2005), p. 167.

⁶⁸ Ibid. Chapter 7.

military aid from the United States and its allies, the Khmer Republic was embroiled in severe social, economic, and security problems. John Tully summarized it well and is worth quoting at length:

The five years of the Khmer Republic were marked by chronic economic crisis: galloping inflation, the collapse of exports, a mounting budget deficit and growing dependence on US subventions. Cambodia's major exports had been rice and rubber, but the communists rapidly overran many of the rubber plantations on the left bank of the Mekong, and others were damaged or destroyed. Secondary industries were hamstrung by a shortage of spare parts and skilled labour: many of the most skilled workers had been Vietnamese and had fled during the pogroms. Tourism was dead, with heavy fighting near the Angkor ruins from early in the war. For much of the life of the Republic, the lower Mekong was impassable or dangerous for shipping due to floating mines and other guerrilla activity, and the road and rail link to the blue water port of Kompong Som (Sihanoukville) was intermittently cut and, in the end, permanently closed to government traffic.⁶⁹

While the population was enduring all the hardship and tragedies of the war, many of the leaders in Phnom Penh were engaging in internal power struggles, and more importantly, in rampant corruption. This was especially true for the army leadership. While soldiers were dying in the battlefields or were suffering from the lack of equipment and financial compensation, some generals profited from arms sales to the Khmer Rouge and pocketed soldiers' salaries. It was also a common practice to have a large number of "ghost" soldiers on the army list to benefit from the U.S. military aid. The *Far Eastern Economic Review* reporter R.P.W. Norton estimated that a year after the coup there were about 30,000 such "ghost" soldiers, costing the treasury almost US\$11 million per year and the lives of countless Khmer soldiers and civilians. And while "ordinary Khmers fought and died, cavorting fops lived the high

⁶⁹ John Tully, *A Short History of Cambodia*, p. 164.

life at glittering balls and parties, even as rockets and shells landed in the capital's outer suburbs.”⁷⁰ As Tully nicely put it, “Indeed, corruption was the only growth industry in Cambodia at the time. One Khmer writer later described Phnom Penh as ‘The City of Bonjour’. (‘Bonjour’ here means corruption, from bribes passed with a handshake and the French greeting.).”⁷¹

By 1973, the Khmer Republic controlled little more than Phnom Penh, plus a narrow corridor of National Road 5 leading to Battambang and the Thai border to the west, as well as a few other provincial towns.⁷² It was a circulated joke that Lon Nol was by then merely the governor of Phnom Penh.⁷³

In 1973, the Vietnamese communists signed the Paris Peace Accords with the U.S., which required them to withdraw their troops from Cambodia.⁷⁴ From then on, most territories in Cambodia had come virtually under the control of the Khmer Rouge, and the conflict in Cambodia had now become a civil war between the Khmers. A major consequence of such change was the decline of support for the Khmer Republic from within and from the international community. As of March 1974, about half of the member countries of the United Nations General Assembly had switched their support to Sihanouk's in-exile GRUNK government. According to the file from the Ministry

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 166.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 165.

⁷² Margaret Slocomb, *An Economic History of Cambodia in the Twentieth Century* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2010), p. 134.

⁷³ Nuon Sothimon, “Cambodia-USA Relations during the Khmer Republic 1970-75,” (MA thesis, Royal Academy of Cambodia, 2002), p. 160.

⁷⁴ On January 27, 1973, the Agreement on Ending the War and Restoring Peace in Vietnam was signed in Paris by representatives of the Vietnamese communists, the South Vietnam government, and the United States, followed by a ceasefire, although it was later broken and war continued between the North and South Vietnamese until the former's victory on April 30, 1975. See William S. Turley, *The Second Indochina War: A Concise Political and Military History*, 2nd edition (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2009), p. xxxi.

of Foreign Affairs of the Khmer Republic, the following countries held diplomatic relations with it:

Argentina, Australia, Australia, Belgium, Bolivia, Bulgaria, Burma, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, France, East Germany, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Israel, Italy, Ivory Coast, Japan, Laos, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Mongolia, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Norway, Panama, Paraguay, the Philippines, Poland, Singapore, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, Turkey, the U.S.A., the U.S.S.R., and Uruguay; Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Korea, and South Vietnam.⁷⁵

Based on the Khmer Republic's assessment report, Sihanouk's GRUNK, on the other hand, enjoyed diplomatic recognition from the following countries/groups, many of which were non-aligned nations in the Middle East and Africa:

Albania, Algeria, Afghanistan, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, People's [Republic of] China, Congo (Brazzaville), Cuba, Dahomey, Egypt, United Arab Emirates, Gabon, Gambia, East Germany, Equatorial Guinea, Guinea, Guyana, Hungary, Iraq, Kuwait, Libya, Madagascar, Mali, Malta, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mongolia, Morocco, Niger, Oman, Pakistan, Romania, Senegal, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tanzania, Togo, Tunisia, Uganda, Upper Volta, the U.S.S.R., North Yemen, South Yemen, Yugoslavia, Zaire, and Zambia; North Korea, North Vietnam, the Vietcong, the P.L.O., and the Pathet Lao.⁷⁶

Although Thailand appeared to have continued voting for the seat of the Khmer Republic, there was less than enthusiastic support. The waning support of Thailand to the Khmer Republic after late 1973, however, had more to do with the changing social and political environment in Thailand during the early 1970s, and is discussed below.

⁷⁵ Abdulgaffar Peang-Meth, "Cambodia and the United Nations," p. 398.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 399.

3.5.2. Discontent in Thailand during the early 1970s

The most significant factor leading to the cooling down of Cambodian-Thai diplomatic relations was the political development in Thailand that brought to power a neutralist civilian government in late 1973. This section deals with the social, economic, and political factors in Thailand, as well as international factors that contributed to the fall of the Thai military regime in October 1973.

Thailand was the only country in Southeast Asia that was not colonized by Western power. Nonetheless, a group of progressive politicians and military leaders managed to push for the end of absolute monarchy and a transition to constitutional monarchy in 1932. Thailand had later been ruled by a series of military governments dominated by Prime Minister Phibunsongkram, while the influence of the monarchy in the political sphere had been minimized. In 1957, General Sarit Thanarat (with complicit approval from the king) staged a coup against Phibun, and led Thailand by forming an alliance with the Thai monarchy and adopted a pro-U.S. foreign policy outlook.⁷⁷ While the alliance with the king helped bolster his legitimacy in the eyes of the general populace, Sarit and his American allies also believed the monarchy would serve as a force of unity and stability, against an apparent threat of communism in Thailand and the region. While the U.S. needed a strong anti-communist like Sarit, the king also considered alliance with Sarit a desirable support for the revival of the monarchy. Meanwhile, the military and their close associates were also able to benefit from business opportunities by forming companies to supply goods and services to

⁷⁷ For discussion on the growing split between Phibun and the Thai king Bhumibol and the making of the coup by General Sarit Thanarat, see Paul M. Handley, *The King Never Smiles: A Biography of Thailand's Bhumibol Adulyadej* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), pp. 128-138.

the government agencies, especially in construction, insurance, and import sectors.⁷⁸

As historians Chris Baker and Pasuk Phongpaichit asserted:

In the late 1950s, the US brought together the military, businessmen, and royalists – the three forces that had tussled since 1932 – in a powerful alliance. Together they resurrected and embellished the vision of a dictatorial strong state, demanding unity to achieve development and to fight off an external enemy – in this era, ‘communism’.⁷⁹

After the coup, Sarit and his associates began to talk of the “Army of the King” and the “government headed by the King”; he also switched Thailand’s national holiday from the day of the 1932 revolution to the king’s birthday instead.⁸⁰ The U.S. also supported the expansion of the king’s role, especially in the rural areas, where communism could be an alternative source of political aspiration. From the late 1950s onward, King Bhumibol made regular tours to the countryside (especially to the northeast) and introduced a series of rural projects such as irrigation systems, fisheries, experimental farming, and the shift from opium to new crop plantations etc. Furthermore, the king’s traditional role in religious Buddhist rituals also became more publicized. The documentaries of the king’s tours were regularly aired on TV, and over the years, the king managed to receive donations to fund his projects and charity work (such as disaster and epidemic reliefs).⁸¹ Consequently, the king’s popularity increased immensely among the Thai people. Overall, the attempts to revive the significance of the monarchy in fact benefitted not just the king, but also his allies. As Baker and Phongpaichit postulated, “The alignment of the army and the business

⁷⁸ Chris Baker and Pasuk Phongpaichit, *A History of Thailand* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 169.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 168.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 177.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 177-178.

concluded by Sarit under US patronage in 1957-1958 benefitted all parties. The U.S. secured a base. The monarchy revived. The generals enjoyed power and profit. Business boomed.”⁸² However, the same authors also rightly remarked: “But these gains did not come without costs, and without releasing new social forces.”⁸³

As in many other parts of the region and the world during the twentieth century, Thailand also began to witness the rise of the left. The Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) was founded in 1942 with the original intent to drive out the “Japanese bandits” and “promote democracy.” By the end of World War II, the party had shifted its determination to overthrow the local military regime in Thailand.⁸⁴ Marxist writings in the Thai language were published in the late 1940s and 1950s. In *Thailand: A Semi-Colony*, for instance, its author Udom Srisuwan condemned the 1932 “revolution” as a failure because of its lack of support from the masses. He also characterized Thailand under military rule as a “semi-feudal semi-colonial” state and likened it to pre-revolutionary China.⁸⁵ Guerilla warfare by the CPT also occurred. Between 1965 and 1976, the Thai government estimated that 2,172 guerrillas and 2,642 government troops had died in 3,992 clashes between the two sides.⁸⁶ According to Baker and Phongpaichit:

[...] the [Thai communist] party began to harvest not only the urban intellectuals’ increasingly bitter frustration against military dictatorship, but also the peasants’ reaction against the market, and the outer regions’ opposition to the imposition of the nation-state with its intrusive bureaucracy and demands for linguistic and cultural uniformity [imposed rigorously since Sarit’s rule].⁸⁷

⁸² Ibid., p. 180.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 181.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 182.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 185.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 183.

Besides the communist insurgency, the Thai military under Thanom Kittikachorn (who succeeded Sarit in 1963) also faced challenges from the urban middle-class and intellectual elements pushing for a return to constitutional rule and expanded democratic space. At the core of this rising urban political force were university students who were becoming politically more assertive and disgruntled with the military regime.⁸⁸ What is important to note here is that since the early 1960s, opportunities for higher education in Bangkok were not confined only to urban elitist groups any more, but were available to a larger number of students from the provinces as well. In slightly over a decade, the number of university students rose from 18,000 in 1961 to 100,000 in 1972.⁸⁹ As Baker and Phongpaichit pointed out, “In the short stories through which this generation shared their experience, the central character is often a provincial boy or girl who escapes from poverty through education, but remains angry at the exploitation of others less fortunate.”⁹⁰ In addition to the limited democratic space, declining social mobility in a time when there was a large number of university graduates also displeased the students.⁹¹ Furthermore, Thailand in the early 1970s also experienced high inflation (the rate was as high as 15% in 1973 and jumped to 24% in 1974). In 1972, there was a surge in the price of rice in the domestic market, while rice production fell by 12%, coupled with decreased global demand.⁹²

⁸⁸ Michael K. Connors, *Democracy and National Identity in Thailand* (New York and London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), pp. 61-62.

⁸⁹ Chris Baker and Pasuk Phongpaichit, *A History of Thailand*, p. 185.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ Maurizio Peleggi, *Thailand: The Worldly Kingdom* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 2007), p. 70.

⁹² Clark D. Neher, “Stability and Instability in Contemporary Thailand,” *Asian Survey*, Vol. 15, No. 12 (Dec., 1975): p. 1100.

In June 1973, demonstrations were held to call for the restoration of the Constitution (promulgated in 1968 but revoked by Thanom in 1971) and democracy. The generals refused to comply and claimed the students were manipulated by the communists.⁹³ On October 13, as many as half a million people took part in a student-led demonstration in Bangkok to call for an end to the military leadership.⁹⁴ The next day, the demonstration turned violent after soldiers opened fire into the student protesters killing some 77 and wounding 857.⁹⁵ King Bhumibol, by then a revered and powerful figure in Thailand, finally intervened by pressuring Thanom and his close associates to go into exile. Afterward, the military was forced to retreat from politics, paving the way for civilian governments pursuing a different foreign policy, thereby affecting Cambodian-Thai diplomatic relations as well.

Following the collapse of Thanom's military government, street protests continued. The protesters campaigned for ending the American use of military bases in Thailand for the war in Vietnam and Cambodia. The resentment was leveled against the presence of some 40,000 American troops in Thailand. The new Thai civilian government under caretaker Prime Minister Sanya Thammasak subsequently attempted to distance itself from heavy involvement in the Indochina war. His government called for a reduction in Thai-U.S. military cooperation and opted for an

⁹³ Chris Baker and Pasuk Phongpaichit, *A History of Thailand*, p. 188.

⁹⁴ Those who had taken part in the October 1973 uprising now refer to themselves as "Octobrists" (*Khon Duean Tula*); given the changing political landscapes in Thailand since 1976 (after the military crackdown on the students and the re-emergence of the conservative forces), the "Octobrists" have been factionalized into various competing groups across the political spectrum in contemporary Thai politics. See Kanokrat Lertchoosakul, "The Rise of the Octobrists: Power and Conflict among Former Left Wing Student Activists in Contemporary Thai Politics" (PhD diss., London School of Economics and Political Science, 2012).

⁹⁵ Ibid.

emphasis on economic and technical cooperation instead.⁹⁶ By extension, Thailand reduced its commitment in Cambodia as Thai public opinion had very little sympathy for the Lon Nol government.⁹⁷ Nonetheless, diplomatic relations were not cut off altogether. Thailand still backed the Khmer Republic's seat at the UN toward the final collapse of the Khmer Republic in April 1975. And although official relations between the two states were on the decline, goods smuggling across the border were still noticeable as the Thai military continued to have networked business alliances with Sek Sam Iet, the then governor of Battambang.⁹⁸

3.5.3. The collapse of the Khmer Republic

As mentioned earlier, the mounting social and economic problems from the war had already begun to take a heavy toll on the Khmer Republic. Historian Margaret Slocomb wrote:

It is not possible to judge the economic performance of the Khmer Republic as anything other than a failure. Despite inputs of foreign assistance, it could neither feed its people nor defend them. By the end of the regime, the population growth had halved and life expectancy had fallen to only 35 years, the level it had been at the end of the Second World War.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Corrine Phuangkasem, *Thailand's Foreign Relations, 1964-80*, p. 36.

⁹⁷ Khien Theeravit, "Thai-Kampuchean Relations," p. 566.

⁹⁸ Email interview with Donald Jameson (August 2012), who was a former officer at the U.S. Embassy in Phnom Penh during the Khmer Republic period. In October 1974, Sek Sam Iet was sacked from his position under American pressure on Lon Nol to launch an anti-corruption campaign in the Khmer Republic. By early 1975, however, Sek Sam Iet was reappointed after his chosen successor proved "incompetent." See Larry Palmer, "Thailand's Kampuchea Incidents," p. 10, fn. 89. At the time of this writing, Sek Sam Iet is a retired senator. When contacted for an interview, he appeared too elderly and fragile for conversation and no interview could be conducted afterward.

⁹⁹ Margaret Slocomb, *An Economic History of Cambodia*, p. 161.

The U.S. bombing had displaced hundreds of thousands (if not millions) of rural Cambodians, many of whom sought refuge in Phnom Penh, swelling the city population to more than 2 million. John Tully remarked: “there was great suffering as people died from malnutrition and sickness, or huddled beneath makeshift shelters, or fell victim to Khmer Rouge artillery fire.”¹⁰⁰ Despite more than US\$2 billion worth of aid from the U.S. (about US\$1.2 billion of which was military aid),¹⁰¹ the Khmer Republic finally collapsed to the Khmer Rouge army on April 17, 1975.

The collapse of the Khmer Republic would usher in another chapter in Cambodian-Thai relations, between a communist regime in Cambodia under the victorious Khmer Rouge and a neutralist-civilian governments in Thailand under Kukrit and Seni Pramoj. Yet, it should also be pointed out that the end of the Khmer Republic did not entail the abolishment of the republican forces. While a number of Khmer Republic leaders did perish at the hands of the Khmer Rouge (such as Sirik Matak and Long Boret – the latter was the last prime minister of the republic), other leaders including In Tam and Lieut. General Sak Sutsakhan managed to flee Cambodia before the Khmer Rouge’s takeover of Phnom Penh. The remnants of these republican leaders would continue to play a part in Cambodian political history and shape the diplomatic relations between Cambodia and Thailand in the 1970s and 1980s, which will be discussed in Chapter 4.

¹⁰⁰ John Tully, *A Short History of Cambodia*, p. 169.

¹⁰¹ Margaret Slocomb, *An Economic History of Cambodia*, p. 156.

3.6. Conclusion

Following the removal of Prince Sihanouk from power in March 1970, Cambodia continued to seek a neutral foreign policy. Unlike in Prince Sihanouk's *Sangkum* period, however, the neutrality for the new Khmer Republic under Lon Nol meant an open confrontation with the communist Vietnamese army presence on Cambodia's territory. Consequently, the new leadership in Cambodia formed a tactical alliance with the U.S. and its allies in the region, including with anti-communist military-ruled Thailand. Between 1970 and late 1973, Thailand provided some military support to the Khmer Republic, though not in the form of combatant troops. With the new alliance in place, the border conflicts that had put the relationship between Cambodia and Thailand during the 1950s and 1960s at strain were now largely absent. Prince Sihanouk, exiled in Beijing, became the nominal head of the GRUNK government (which also comprised the communist Khmer Rouge leaders) and continued to be antagonistic toward the U.S. and her allies as he had been during the *Sangkum* period. As the Vietnam War dragged on, the U.S. faced increasing domestic pressure to withdraw from the region. Likewise, Thailand experienced remarkable social and political changes that eventually resulted in mass protests in October 1973 that brought about a change of regime from a pro-U.S. military dictatorship to more neutralist civilian governments under Kukrit and Seni Pramroj. Although Thailand after 1973 did not abruptly alter its relationship with Cambodia, the new government was less than enthusiastic to be involved in the war in Cambodia. The new stance also reflected the sentiments of the unenthusiastic Thai public opinion toward the Vietnam War as a whole.

Adopting Lee Jones's "social conflict" analysis, we can understand better why the Khmer Republic's foreign policy toward Thailand (and vice versa) occurred the way that it did between 1970 and 1975. The "social conflict" framework suggests that "we should analyze the way in which potential security issues are viewed by different societal forces operating upon and within the state and understand security policy as the outcome of power struggles between these forces," and that "different societal groups always evaluate potential security issues in relation to their own interests, ideologies, and strategies."¹⁰² As demonstrated in this chapter, Cambodia's relationship with Thailand took a positive turn after March 1970. This shift did not stem from a change in the balance of power in the international arena; nor was there any decline in either country's military power to reduce the two countries' threat perception toward one another. A realist explanation which views foreign policy and securitization as a result of the changes of circumstances in objective material threat and/or national interest cannot explain why the Khmer Republic forged positive relations with Thailand during the first half of the 1970s. Instead, the changing domestic societal forces which led to the rise of the Lon Nol government were the driving factors of this shift of relations. As mentioned earlier, although the Lon Nol government claimed to profess neutrality in its foreign policy, it differed from Sihanouk's government that preceded it: the leaders of the Khmer Republic did not tolerate the Vietnamese communist presence in Cambodian territory, and, unlike Sihanouk, they viewed alliance with the U.S. an enhancement of their power position at home. Because the Thai military government shared the same ideology and strategic interests, relations between Cambodia and Thailand became friendly almost

¹⁰² Lee Jones, "Beyond Securitization: Explaining the Scope of Security Policy in Southeast Asia," *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* (2011): p. 4.

immediately after Sihanouk was deposed. Their relationship was reinforced further thanks to the nominal alliance of their enemies: Sihanouk, the Khmer Rouge, and the Thai communists. Cooperation between the Khmer Republic and Thailand was in the forms of military aid and logistic support from Thailand to Cambodia, which lasted until Thanom Kittikachorn's government was forced out of power by student protests in October 1973.

From late 1973 to the collapse of the Khmer Republic in April 1975, a cooling down of diplomatic relations between the two nations ensued, given the neutralist foreign policy outlook under the new civilian government in Thailand. The new Thai government responded to public opinion by lowering their commitment in the Vietnam War. This happened also at a time when the Nixon administration was facing strong domestic pressure to withdraw from the region. Nonetheless, some sections within the Thai military continued to have unofficial relations with some Khmer Republic elites (especially through smuggled border trades). And although the change of government in Thailand decelerated Thailand's cooperation with Cambodia, it did not lead to any open hostility, given that it was not in the interest of either government domestically if such a problem were to occur.

When writing about antagonistic nationalism and historical animosity in Cambodian-Thai relations, many scholars tend to not include in their discussion relations during the Khmer Republic period (1970-75). This is simply because those problems did not become hot issues during this period. Nationalism was indeed an important element in the Khmer Republic domestic politics and foreign affairs, as the elites of the regime

lacked legitimacy especially in the rural areas and therefore needed it to bolster their domestic and international support. However, rather than the kind of nationalism and antagonism expressed earlier toward Thailand as in the case of Sihanouk's regime, the Khmer Republic elites directed their nationalistic antagonism toward the Vietnamese communists, which resulted in the massacre of Vietnamese civilians in Cambodia who were accused of being communist spies. It can be argued here that although nationalism and historical animosity can sometimes be invoked in foreign policy by political elites to bolster their domestic authority and legitimacy, it is more likely to be utilized when the target groups do not share the same ideology and mutual strategic interests. Hence, instead of Thailand (as in the case of Sihanouk's policy), in this case, the communist Vietnamese were the target for the Khmer Republic's antagonistic nationalism.

This and the previous chapter have demonstrated that one cannot understand the shift of Cambodia-Thailand diplomatic relations by looking only at the changes of regional/international politics or viewing relations only through the lens of historically-embedded nationalism as realists or structural constructivists would prefer, respectively. The shift from hostile relations during Sihanouk's rule to cooperation during the Khmer Republic rule was a case in point. The change of government in Cambodia with a different ideology (anti-communist), domestic power interest (strategic alliance with the U.S.), and perception of external threats (anti-Vietnamese rather than Thailand) entailed new foreign policy formulations that would serve these aspects accordingly. The next chapter will examine further changes in foreign relations as the communist regime took power in Cambodia and re-adjusted

its foreign policy toward a series of successive governments in Thailand between 1975 and 1979. Once again, the “social conflict” analysis would prove to be a useful framework for viewing and analyzing these shifts.

Chapter 4: Democratic Kampuchea Period (1975-1979)

4.1. Introduction

On April 17, 1975, the Khmer Rouge army entered Phnom Penh and effectively ended the Khmer Republic's rule in Cambodia. While the brutalities committed by the Khmer Rouge on the Cambodian population between 1975 and 1979 are well-documented,¹ discussion on the regime's foreign relations is relatively limited. This is partly due to the fact that Democratic Kampuchea (as the Khmer Rouge regime was officially known) was less interested in seeking broad international support, especially during the early years. During this period, diplomatic relations between Cambodia and Thailand went through a period of ebbs and flows: from neutral neighbors in mid-1975 to antagonists between October 1976 and October 1977, and eventually toward rapprochement in 1978. This chapter examines the various power groups and their competing ideologies and strategic interests in both Cambodia and Thailand, which largely influenced the direction of the relationships between the two states from April 1975 to January 1979. Specifically, the chapter discusses:

- i) the cordial relations from April 1975 to October 1976 between Democratic Kampuchea and Thailand's civilian governments under Kukrit and Seni Pramoj;
- ii) antagonistic relations after the October 1976 coup that brought about an anti-communist military government under Kriangsak in Thailand; and

¹ See for example, Ben Kiernan, *The Pol Pot Regime: Race, Power, and Genocide in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge, 1975—1979*, 3rd edition (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008).

iii) rapprochement following the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia in early 1978.

Between 1975 and 1979, Pol Pot and his associates in the Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK) were the main foreign policy makers of Democratic Kampuchea (DK). Many of those who became the top leaders of Democratic Kampuchea had been former students who went to study in France and returned to Cambodia during the 1950s and joined the communist movement. A noticeable exception was Nuon Chea (a.k.a. “Brother Number 2”), who later became DK’s Chairman of the National Assembly. Nuon Chea had studied law at Thammasat University in Bangkok and joined the leftist Thai Youth Organization in 1947. By 1950, he had become a member of the Thai communist party. But as Eiji Murashima remarked, “Little or nothing about Nuon Chea’s Thailand times explain his radical and murderous policy choices when the Khmer Rouge were in power. These choices must have other roots, such as Nuon’s experiences while in Vietnam or after his return to Cambodia in 1955.”² The same could probably be said about the other senior leaders of Democratic Kampuchea who returned from France and took a rather anti-Vietnamese stance once in power.

Although other (more moderate) factions of the Khmer Rouge did exist, they did not or could not pose a serious challenge to Pol Pot’s leadership and grip of power in decision-making. In fact, those Khmer Rouge cadres who were perceived as disloyal

² Eiji Murashima, “The Young Nuon Chea in Bangkok (1942_1950) and the Communist Party of Thailand: The Life in Bangkok of the Man Who Became “Brother No. 2” in the Khmer Rouge,” *Journal of Asia-Pacific Studies* (Waseda University) No. 12 (March 2009): p. 1.

to Pol Pot were purged in great numbers. As the whole population was virtually enslaved and no meaningful civil society existed to challenge the highly centralized and secretive politburo, Pol Pot's faction monopolized power in all social, economic, and political aspects in Democratic Kampuchea.³ Thailand during the same period, however, experienced continuous power contestations between civilian and military political forces (including between different factions within the military). Such elite power struggles also took place within the context of social tensions between various groups of progressive, conservative, and leftist revolutionary leanings. At the same time, the existence of resistance factions on both the Cambodian and Thai sides and their cross-national alliances during this period also played a part in how relations between the two countries evolved.

This chapter argues that the domestic power struggles in Thailand during the second half of the 1970s were most influential in shaping Cambodia-Thailand diplomatic relations during this period. And while the changes of regional and international balances of power were somewhat significant and will be discussed, they were only a secondary factor. Conventional understanding of Cambodian-Thai relations as a product of nationalism or *realpolitik* in the international arena should be qualified and should instead be viewed within the context of factional politics and domestic power struggles, particularly in Thailand. The “social conflict” analysis once again is most useful in shedding light on the complexities of Cambodian-Thai relations during this period.

³ In fact, even those among the top Khmer Rouge leadership generally distance themselves from the horrendous records of the regime and place their blame squarely on Pol Pot's “extremism” for the policies implemented. See, for example, Khieu Samphan, *The Recent History of Cambodia and My Subsequent Stances*, 2nd edition (Phnom Penh: Ponleu Khmer Printing and Publishing House, 2003).

4.2. Democratic Kampuchea's foreign policy outlook

Soon after their victory in April 1975, the Khmer Rouge ordered foreigners to leave Cambodia, while residents and refugees in Phnom Penh were evacuated to the countryside. Cambodia was to begin anew from “Year Zero,” modeling the French “Year One” following its radical revolution in 1789. Article 21 of Democratic Kampuchea's constitution stated that the regime:

[...] fervently and earnestly desires to maintain close and friendly relations with all countries sharing a common border and with all those near and distant throughout the world in conformity with the principles of mutual and absolute respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity. Democratic Kampuchea adheres to a policy of independence, peace, neutrality and non-alignment. It will permit absolutely no foreign country to maintain military bases on its territory and is resolutely opposed to all forms of outside interference in its internal affairs, and to all forms of subversion and aggression against Democratic Kampuchea from outside, whether military, political, cultural, social, diplomatic, or humanitarian. Democratic Kampuchea refuses all intervention in the domestic affairs of other countries, and scrupulously respects the principle that every country is sovereign and entitled to manage and decide its own affairs without outside interference.⁴

Given China's support for the Khmer Rouge movement before they came to power, it was not surprising that China was to become the most important ally of Democratic Kampuchea.⁵ The United States, in contrast, was denounced as an imperialist power and diplomatic relations between the two countries were cut off. Democratic Kampuchea's relationships with its neighboring countries, on the other hand, were a

⁴ For an analysis on DK's constitution, see David P. Chandler, “The Constitution of Democratic Kampuchea (Cambodia): The Semantics of Revolutionary Change: Notes and Comment,” *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 49, No. 3 (Autumn, 1976): pp. 506-515.

⁵ A recent book by Andrew Martha, however, argues that despite China's aid to Democratic Kampuchea, the former had little influence over the latter's policies. See Andrew Martha, *Brother in Arms: Chinese Aid to the Khmer Rouge, 1975–1979* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014).

mixed record and were ambivalent. Notably, Democratic Kampuchea's foreign policy was indeed based on neutrality without regards to its neighbors' ideologies and was strongly opposed to foreign interference in its domestic affairs. Democratic Kampuchea under Pol Pot's leadership resented any regime it perceived as imposing hegemony over Cambodia. This explains why Cambodia's relationship with Vietnam would turn sour (despite the fact that both countries were communist), while relations with Thailand between 1975 and 1979 fluctuated depending on who held power in Thailand. Throughout its existence, Democratic Kampuchea had relatively few foreign contacts. P. C. Pradhan reckoned that due to economic constraints, DK's diplomatic missions abroad were restricted to: Peking, Pyongyang, Hanoi, and Vientiane; while foreign diplomatic missions within Cambodia were restricted to only nine countries: China, North Korea, Vietnam (until December 1977), Laos, Cuba, Albania, Romania, Yugoslavia, and Egypt.⁶

It should be recalled that since October 1973, Thailand had been ruled by a neutralist civilian government after student protests in Bangkok forced the Thai military to retreat from politics. Eventually, a constitution was promulgated and a new civilian government under Kukrit Pramoj took control in 1975. As Clark Neher argued, the new Thai government faced several challenges:

(1) formation of a viable government following the January 1975 elections, (2) the balancing of various elite groups (military, business, intellectuals, students, etc.), (3) the government's capacity to meet the needs of the people, despite a deteriorating economy, and (4) foreign-policy and internal security crises following the change in governments in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos.⁷

⁶ P. C. Pradhan, *Foreign Policy of Kampuchea* (New Delhi: Radiant Publishers, 1985), p. 186.

⁷ Clark D. Neher, "Stability and Instability in Contemporary Thailand," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 15, No. 12 (Dec., 1975): p. 1104.

As far as foreign relations were concerned, Thailand under Kukrit Pramoj pursued a neutralist foreign policy. In his address to the Thai parliament in March 1975, Prime Minister Kukrit proclaimed:

This government will pursue an independent policy taking into account national interests which are based on economic and security considerations. This government will promote peaceful coexistence by befriending every country which demonstrates goodwill toward Thailand, irrespective of differences in ideologies or political systems; rather, non-interference in internal affairs, justice, and equality will be the considered principles (in ordering bilateral relations).⁸

As such, the foreign policy of Kukrit government echoed that of Democratic Kampuchea, which explained the cordial relations between the two governments in 1975 and 1976.

4.3. Relations from April 1975 to October 1976: neutral ties

In 1982, Thai political scientist Khien Theeravit wrote:

The [elected civilian] Kukrit government [in 1975] sought accommodation with all communist countries, including Democratic Kampuchea. This new foreign policy orientation did not deviate from Thai public opinion, and the Thai military, in its politically weakened condition, had no objection. As a result Thailand was the first country in ASEAN to recognize the new [Khmer Rouge] regime on April 18, 1975, only one day after the communist takeover of Phnom Penh.⁹

⁸ Cited in Sukhumbhand Paribatra, "The Enduring Logic in Thai Foreign Policy and National Security Interests: Implications for the 1980s and Beyond," *Institute of Security and International Studies* (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University, 1984), p. 2.

⁹ Khien Theeravit, "Thai-Kampuchean Relations: Problems and Prospects," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 22, No. 6 (June 1982): p. 566.

However, he also noted that:

Agreement on the exchange of diplomatic missions was reached but was not put into practice. The main problem was the Kampuchean preoccupation with internal tensions and the low priority given to formal international relations. This posture towards Thailand was not a departure from Kampuchean regime's overall posture, and the Thais understood that they were not being discriminated against.¹⁰

Khien Theeravit's observation was by and large accurate for the period 1975-1976, but DK-Thailand relations during this period merits further discussion.

In the very early days after the Khmer Rouge victory, DK-Thailand relations were in a state of uncertainty and confusion, perhaps due to a lack of clear communications between the highly secretive Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK) headquarter in Phnom Penh and the local/regional leaders along the Cambodian-Thai border. In fact, different factions among the Khmer Rouge did not have a clear idea yet about who was in power in Cambodia in those early days.

Two days after the takeover of Phnom Penh in April, the five-hundred strong 17th Battalion of the Khmer Rouge occupied Poipet, a Cambodian town in the west bordering Thailand. A few days later, a senior Khmer Rouge official in Poipet informed a Thai journalist that the border would be opened to Thai visitors in ten days' time.¹¹ Like many other promises of diplomatic ties the Khmer Rouge would make afterwards, that did not materialize. On April 24, 1975, the Khmer Rouge even

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 566-567.

¹¹ Ben Kiernan, *The Pol Pot Regime*, p. 139. Kiernan's accounts on the early relations between the Khmer Rouge and Thailand were based largely on the *Bangkok Post* news articles at the time.

evacuated the town, citing the fear that “Thai troops might invade Cambodia.”¹² Yet, during the first few months, large amounts of rice and diesel fuel were smuggled from Thailand into Poipet as there was still no supply of these necessities from the Phnom Penh leadership as yet. As one of the top three high-ranking Khmer Rouge officials in Battambang (also in northwestern part of Cambodia) complained to a Western journalist in April, “Who is there to give us food? Supplies from China and Russia are not coming in due to the confusion as to who was the real power in Cambodia.”¹³

On higher diplomatic levels, however, Democratic Kampuchea’s relations with the Thai civilian government were more amiable. Responding to both domestic sentiment and the re-ordering of regional power position following the U.S. disengagement from Southeast Asia and U.S.-China *détente*, the Thai government under Kukrit did not view Democratic Kampuchea as a threat but as a neutral neighbor that Thailand had to reckon with. Unlike his military predecessors, Kukrit made it clear that his government did not welcome U.S. military bases on Thai soil and promised to have U.S. troops withdrawn from Thailand by March 1976.¹⁴ Although Kukrit Pramroj was from the conservative political circle, there was strong public pressure for his government to demand the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Thailand. As Thai political scientist Phuanthong Rungwasdisab remarked:

In fact, criticism of the patron-client relationship between the Thai military and the U.S. had emerged at the beginning of the 1970s. American-educated Thai intellectuals played a major role in raising concern over the atrocities the Americans were committing in Indochina. They strongly criticized the presence of the U.S. troops as violating Indochina’s internal affairs, and also objected to Thailand’s

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., p. 140.

¹⁴ Corrine Phuangkasem, “Thailand’s Foreign Relations, 1964-80,” (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1984), p. 37.

role in the Vietnam War. At the beginning, the young Thai intellectuals expressed their voices in an academic journal named *Sangkhomsat Parithat* (Social Science Review). Later, this critical view was widely adopted and appeared in several new journals and magazines after the October 14 uprising in Thailand and the collapse of the right-wing regimes in South Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos in 1975. The withdrawal of the U.S. bases in Thailand became one of the top campaign issues for the leading student organization, the National Student Center of Thailand (NSCT), after 1973.¹⁵

Premier Kukrit's demand was pressed for more forcefully after what became known as "the *Mayaguez* affair" in May 1975.

4.3.1. The *Mayaguez* affair (May 1975)

Thai premier Kukrit Pramoj's foreign policy toward the U.S. and Democratic Kampuchea was put to a test when an American merchant ship named "SS *Mayaguez*" was captured by the Khmer Rouge about eight miles off the Puolo Wei Island in the Gulf of Thailand on May 12, 1975. The ship was en route from Hong Kong to Sattahip in Thailand. Though occupied by Cambodian communist troops, Puolo Wei Island was claimed by both Cambodia and Vietnam because of the potential oil deposits in the area. Given the contention, the local Cambodian communists were instructed to "keep foreign ships" out of Cambodian waters, although there was no indication of how far out from the shore such instructions were to be implemented.¹⁶

¹⁵ Puangthong Rungwasdisab, "Thailand's Response to the Cambodian Genocide," in *Cambodian Genocide Program*, Yale University. http://www.yale.edu/cgp/thailand_response.html. Accessed April 1, 2013.

¹⁶ Minutes of U.S. National Security Council Meeting on May 15, 1975 on "Seizure of American Ship by Cambodian Authorities." See Bradley L. Coleman and Edward C. Keefer (eds.), *Foreign Relations*

In an attempt to rescue the *Mayaguez*, the U.S. launched its military operations from the U-Tapao base in Thailand without informing the Thai Government beforehand. A telegram from the U.S. Embassy in Bangkok had warned Washington of seriously hurting U.S.-Thailand relationships for undertaking such operations from within Thai territory. Thai Premier Kukrit had relayed his message through the U.S. Embassy in Bangkok that “from the Thai Government standpoint any retaliation should be purely between the United States and Cambodia and should not in any way involve Thailand.”¹⁷ In an aide memoire to the U.S. Embassy in Bangkok on May 14, Kukrit warned that unless the U.S. Marines were withdrawn immediately, the “good relations and cooperation existing between Thailand and the U.S. would be exposed to serious and damaging consequences.”¹⁸ Earlier, the U.S. State Department had previously told its embassy in Bangkok that:

you should understand that we will be required to utilize U-Tapao as may be necessary in order to secure promptly the release of the vessel and Americans [...] We realize that there may be costs with the Thais but the balance of interests requires that we be willing to take whatever risks may be involved in our relations with Thais.”¹⁹

This demonstrated the willingness of the U.S. government to sacrifice its possible diplomatic fallout with Thailand for the sake of restoring American credibility and public confidence over the handling of the *Mayaguez* affair.

of the United States, 1969-1976 (Vol. X) (Washington D.C.: Department of State, U.S. Government Printing House, 2010), pp. 1018-1019.

¹⁷ Telegram from the Embassy in Thailand to the Department of State, “Thai Unwillingness to Let the U.S. Flex Its Thai Based Military Forces in Indochina”; May 13, 1975. Ibid., p. 1029.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 1064.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 1042.

On May 15, the operation managed to secure the *Mayaguez* and its crew members, though many Americans died in the operation as well. As historian Kenton Clymer suggested, “Including those killed in the helicopter crash in Thailand, more Americans died in the rescue attempt than Mayaguez crew members were freed.”²⁰ More importantly, as a result of its military operation, the U.S. ended up damaging its diplomatic relations with Thailand. While the Thai army had been privately in support of the U.S. military action, and although Prime Minister Kukrit personally could have closed his eyes to the matter, he was under pressure to publicly condemn the American operation. Before long, Thai newspapers urged the government to publicize all agreements between the U.S. and Thailand and immediately close down all U.S. bases in Thailand. Believing that the time was right to create a political crisis for Kukrit’s government, Thai leftist politicians also held a rally in Bangkok demanding that all U.S. troops leave Thailand within ten days.²¹ Eventually, Kukrit issued demands that the U.S. withdraw its troops from Thailand by March 1976.

4.3.2. Thailand-China *détente*

In response to the U.S.’s planned disengagement from Southeast Asia, Thailand had already considered readjusting its foreign policy toward China as early as 1969, though no serious action had been taken. Thai leaders had been reluctant to establish formal relationships with China, given the latter’s support for the Thai communist insurgency. In addition, many Thais also feared that cheap imports from China would hurt Thai local industries and that China would channel the generated profits to the

²⁰ Kenton Clymer, *The United States and Cambodia, 1969-2000: A Troubled Relationship* (London & New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), p. 104.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 1081.

Thai communist insurgents. After the APEC oil crisis in 1973, however, Thailand turned to China as an alternative source of oil import. Following Deputy Foreign Minister Chatichai Choonhavan's visit to Beijing in December 1973, China agreed to sell 50,000 tons of oil to Thailand at a "friendship" price.²² Realizing that the Thai communist insurgency had its roots in domestic economic problems and social inequalities in Thailand rather than external support, Kukrit was of the opinion that formal relations with the PRC would help reduce the Chinese support for Thai insurgents.²³ After several contacts and negotiations, Thailand's traditional fear of China's aggression eventually subsided, thus enabling better relations between the two countries, especially after China agreed to adhere to the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence.²⁴ Finally, on July 1, 1975, Thailand formally established diplomatic ties with China, becoming the 101st nation to recognize the People's Republic of China (PRC).²⁵

China also attempted to foster good relations between Democratic Kampuchea and Thailand in an effort to contain or counter Vietnamese and Soviet influence in Southeast Asia. According to Peter Poole, China loaned Cambodia the airplane in which DK Foreign Minister Ieng Sary and the Cambodian delegation flew to Thailand. Ieng Sary and his team were met at Bangkok's airport by the newly appointed Chinese ambassador to Thailand, who feted them during their stay in

²² See Corrine Phuangkasem, "Thailand's Foreign Relations, 1964-80," pp. 37-38.

²³ M.L. Bhansoon Ladavalya, *Thailand's Foreign Policy under Kukrit Pramoj: A Study in Decision-Making* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1980), pp. 106-107.

²⁴ See Corrine Phuangkasem, "Thailand's Foreign Relations, 1964-80," pp. 37-38.

²⁵ M.L. Bhansoon Ladavalya, *Thailand's Foreign Policy under Kukrit Pramoj*, p. 113.

Bangkok.²⁶ Poole also remarked that “The Thai-Cambodian rapprochement came at a time when Thai leaders publicly acknowledged that their efforts to normalize relations with Hanoi were at least suspended; Thai forces were engaged in small-scale clashes with Hanoi-supported Pathet Lao troops along the Mekong River border.”²⁷ Although improving relations with Vietnam was part of Kukrit’s foreign policy, the rapprochement between Thailand and Vietnam proved difficult for a number of reasons. In addition to the different political ideologies and Thailand’s fear of Vietnam’s rising hegemony in the region following the communist takeover of Saigon in late April 1975, Somporn Sangchai also mentioned other underlying obstacles:

North Vietnam could not forgive or forget Thailand’s active participation in the Vietnam conflict, in which Thailand allowed the stationing of U.S. airbases in Thailand, and sent troops to fight against the communist forces in Vietnam and Laos. Thailand, on the other hand, is not happy with the refusal of Vietnam to repatriate 40,000 Vietnamese refugees who took refuge in Thailand in the early 1950s, and with the active support North Vietnam has given to the communist terrorist movement in Thailand.²⁸

Further complicating Kukrit’s attempt to restore relations with Vietnam was his government’s failure to return the 125 American aircraft flown out of Vietnam when Saigon (the former capital of South Vietnam) collapsed. The ownership of the aircraft was claimed by both the U.S. and Vietnam, while Thailand’s now Foreign Minister Chatichai Choonhavan also spoke in favor of keeping the aircraft in Thai custody.²⁹ Vietnam demanded the return of the aircraft, calling Thailand to:

²⁶ Peter A. Poole, “Cambodia 1975: The Grunk Regime,” *Asian Survey*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (Jan., 1976): p. 27.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Somporn Sangchai, “Thailand: Rising of the Rightist Phoenix,” in *Southeast Asian Affairs* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1976), p. 390.

²⁹ M.L. Bhansoon Ladavalya, *Thailand’s Foreign Policy under Kukrit Pramoj*, p. 114.

[...] manifest its goodwill by practical deeds, first of all, by returning to the PRG [Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam] all the planes, warships and other property of South Vietnam which have been taken by Thailand by members of the puppet army and administration.³⁰

Before Kukrit's government's dilemma was resolved, many of the high quality aircraft were removed secretly out of Thailand to the U.S. carrier "Midway" in the Gulf of Thailand (probably with the permission from the Thai military). As a result, Kukrit's government's effort to normalize relations with Vietnam did not materialize until the government of his brother, Seni Pramoj, came into office the following year.³¹

4.3.3. DK-Thailand's shared interests (1975-1976)

Among all the countries that had diplomatic relations with Lon Nol's Khmer Republic during the civil war, only Thailand was recognized by Democratic Kampuchea in 1975. As mentioned earlier, Thailand also recognized Democratic Kampuchea on April 18, 1975, only one day after the Khmer Rouge takeover of Phnom Penh. Apart from the initial confusion along the border, Kukrit's government pursued cooperative diplomacy toward Democratic Kampuchea. In the *Mayaguez* affair, Thailand was not willing to allow the U.S. to launch its rescue operation into Cambodia from military bases in Thailand. After the U.S. ignored warnings from Thailand, the two countries' relations were strained, as American troops were ordered to leave Thailand the following year. Following the brief *Mayaguez* affair, Kukrit's government extended

³⁰ From *Nhan Dan*, the official party newspaper of Hanoi, quoted in *Bangkok Post*, May 3, 1975. Cited in M.L. Bhansoon Ladavalaya, *Thailand's Foreign Policy under Kukrit Pramoj*, p. 115.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 115-116.

further relations to Democratic Kampuchea. In late October 1975, during the visit by a Cambodian delegation to Bangkok, the two countries issued the Cambodian-Thai Joint Communiqué based on “mutual respect for the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity on the basis of their present frontiers; non-interference in each other’s internal affairs; non-aggression, equality, mutual interest and peaceful coexistence.”³²

In addition to diplomatic normalization, trade relations also increased between Cambodia and Thailand. Upon his official visit to Thailand in late October 1975, DK Foreign Minister Ieng Sary informed the Thai premier that Cambodia declined international aid and would not accept assistance from Thailand. He did, however, express the need to import basic necessities and consumer products from Thailand, including rice, sugar, refined oil, and salt; in return, Cambodia could supply timber and smoked fish.³³ Soon after trade resumption, Thai businessmen in Aranyaprathet (across from Poipet, on the Thai side of the border) complained that the Khmer Rouge owed them up to twenty million *baht* in credit.³⁴ By July 1976, a report from the U.S. government’s watchers showed that low quality rubber from Cambodia began appearing in Aranyaprathet, although “No one knew from what part of Cambodia it came or whether it had been produced years earlier or was newly produced. The consensus was that it was old.”³⁵ Besides rubber, Nayan Chanda of the *Far Eastern Economic Review* also reported Cambodian exports of small quantities of teak,

³² Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam) Archive file No. D29847, “Cambodian Communiqué on Cambodian-Thai Border Situation.”

³³ Ben Kiernan, *The Pol Pot Regime*, p. 143.

³⁴ Ibid. The claim was published in the *Bangkok Post* on December 3, 1975; it is unclear whether the debts were settled afterward.

³⁵ Charles H. Twining, “The Economy,” in Karl Jackson (ed.), *Cambodia 1975–1978: Rendezvous with Death* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 135.

gemstones, hides, and dried fish to Thailand.³⁶ Between July and October 1976, the Khmer Rouge imported stockpiles of other consumer products, including raincoats, knives, axes, sickles, machine oil and parts, color paints and black cloth, nylon sacks, charcoal, vegetable seeds, sugar, as well as medicines such as penicillin, quinine, and vitamin C and B1.³⁷ By the end of November 1976, imports from Thailand had totaled to 38,984,630 *baht* (close to US\$2 million at the time), whereas exports from Cambodia to Thailand consisting of gold, coffee, opium and animal skins were worth up to 23,117,617 *baht* (about US\$1,127,688.634).³⁸ It was only after the military coup in Thailand in early October 1976 that Cambodia saw a remarkable reduction of trade with Thailand, and would later turn to Hong Kong as an alternative source of import supplies.³⁹

Yet, what remained problematic in Cambodian-Thai relations before the October 1976 coup in Thailand were the inter-related issues of refugees, resistance forces, and the Thai army's un-subordination to the civilian control in dealing with the Khmer Rouge.

4.3.4. Khmer refugees and armed resistance forces (1975-1976)

When the Khmer Rouge captured Phnom Penh in April 1975, some senior Khmer Republican leaders who were on the Khmer Rouge death list such as Premier Long

³⁶ Nayan Chanda, "Phnom Penh's Undercover Men," *FEER*, December 10, 1976, p. 50.

³⁷ For the exact quantities of traded products, see DC-Cam Archive file No. D22041, "List of settle one's account of import merchandise and export production to Thai's market on 31/11/76" (sic). This document from the Ministry of Commerce of Democratic Kampuchea is more accurately translated as "Balance Sheet of Import-Export Trade with Thailand as of 30.11.76."

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Ben Kiernan, *The Pol Pot Regime*, p.145.

Boreth and Prince Sisowath Sirik Matak were executed immediately.⁴⁰ Other civilian and military leaders, however, managed to escape to the Thai border or sought refuge in the West. While some retired in France or the United States and became politically inactive, others managed to mobilize the remnants of Lon Nol soldiers in the refugee camps along the Thai border.⁴¹ By November 1976, some 23,000 refugees had fled Cambodia and about 12,000 of them remained in four main camps in Prachinburi, Chantaburi, Trat, and Surin provinces in Thailand.⁴² Though collectively known as the “Khmer Sereikar” (i.e. *Khmer Liberation*), these resistance groups were operating in isolation from one another and were co-opted differently by various wings of the Thai armed forces. According to Stephen Heder, the Khmer Sereikar leaderships were composed mostly of lower ranking military officers, as well as civil servants from the Lon Nol and Sihanouk regimes, and shared similar aspirations:

[...] they want a non-communist, preferably an anti-Communist, Kampuchea in which it will [be] politically and economically possible for an urban elite to express and enjoy itself. They want a Kampuchea free of Vietnamese domination [...] Also, they all either depend on or exist only at the sufferance of the Thai.⁴³

Acting independently from Kukrit’s civilian government, the Thai army attempted to use the Khmer Sereikar as a counter force to the communist Khmer Rouge. As such, the operations of the Khmer resistance groups and their relationship with the Thai army or other Thai political factions varied considerably. It is worth quoting Stephen Heder at length here:

⁴⁰ The seven Khmer Republic leaders on the Khmer Rouge death list were Lon Nol, Sirik Matak, Cheng Heng, In Tam, Long Boret, Son Ngoc Thanh, and Sosthene Fernandez.

⁴¹ Stephen R. Heder, “Kampuchean Occupation and Resistance,” *Asian Studies Monographs No. 027*, Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University (January, 1980): p. 84.

⁴² Larry Palmer, “Thailand’s Kampuchea Incidents: Territorial Disputes and Armed Confrontation along the Thai-Kampuchea Frontier,” *News from Kampuchea*, Vol. 1 No. 4 (Oct. 1977): p. 10.

⁴³ Stephen Heder, “Kampuchean Occupation and Resistance,” p. 80.

Sometimes they meant becoming friendly with Thai army battalion commanders or Thai Border Patrol Police units. Sometimes they meant sponsorship from the intelligence or special operations branches of the Thai Army. Sometimes they meant linking up with rabidly anti-Communist Thai political movements headquartered in Bangkok but coincidentally having chapters in border provinces. Sometimes they meant coming under protection of influential Thais of Khmer extraction who were important in provincial politics and who often had been involved in the post-World War II activities of the Khmer Issarak and the clandestine operations of the Khmer Serei, the Issarak's successor, which had opposed Sihanouk with Thai support.⁴⁴

Attacks on the Khmer Rouge by the resistance groups had already taken place as early as April 1975. In early December that year, upon pursuing these rightist resistance forces on what they considered Cambodian territory, the Khmer Rouge army encountered a group of Thai Border Patrol Policemen (with whom the Khmer rightist groups were taking shelter). Two weeks of violent exchanges between the two sides occurred as a result. In a diplomatic gesture to calm the situation, Thailand's civilian premier Kukrit Pramoj publicly condemned In Tam, a former Khmer Republic prime minister (between May and December 1973), as the cause of the incidents. Thai foreign minister Chatichai Choonhavan even suggested that if In Tam and the refugees were permitted to stay at the border, problems between the two countries would occur. In spite of the disagreement by Thailand's hardline National Security Council, In Tam was forced to leave Thailand at the end of December, although other refugees and rightist groups remained in the country.⁴⁵ Sek Sam Iet, the former

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 84.

⁴⁵ Larry Palmer, "Thailand's Kampuchea Incidents," pp. 10-11. In Tam, however, denied the accusation made by the Thai government. Instead, he claimed that the clashes were the result of a conflict between two Khmer Rouge groups, when some twenty-four defecting Khmer Rouge soldiers were pursued across the border by a group of about seventy others who would be confronted by Thai Border Patrol Policemen. He also claimed that he himself had always asked to go to Bangkok but was told by Thai Foreign Minister Chatichai to stay in the border area, presumably to serve as a buffer force against the Khmer Rouge. See Puangthong Rungswasdisab, "Thailand's Response to the Cambodian

governor of Battambang from the Khmer Republican era, also led a rightist group which reportedly gathered intelligence for the Thai Supreme Command office and at times penetrated into Cambodia for attacks against the Khmer Rouge. In addition, his group also reportedly ran a clandestine business with Thai army officers in smuggling Cambodian logs into Thailand.⁴⁶ Worse still, the group allegedly acted like bandits by robbing wealthy Cambodian refugees to Thailand.⁴⁷

To resolve the problems along the border, Thai Foreign Minister Chatichai and his Cambodian counterpart Ieng Sary agreed to meet in Cambodia on February 27, 1976. In an attempt to please Ieng Sary, the Thai minister announced that his country would no longer accept Indochinese refugees and also intended to deport almost ten thousand Cambodian refugees.⁴⁸ In April, however, Kukrit's government was replaced by that of his brother, Seni Promoj, following the dissolution of the parliament and a snap election. Despite the change of government, Seni Pramoj continued the efforts to retain a good relationship with Democratic Kampuchea. And amid all the occasional border clashes between the Khmer Rouge army/navy and their Thai counterparts, Democratic Kampuchea and the Thai civilian governments strived to retain their mutually conciliatory positions. For instance, in mid-June 1976, Thailand's new foreign minister Bhichai Rattakul and his team travelled secretly to Battambang to discuss with Ieng Sary the prospects of exchanging ambassadors, promoting international trade, and the issues of border demarcation and exchange of arrested

Genocide," in *Cambodian Genocide Program*, Yale University, at http://www.yale.edu/cgp/thailand_response.html. Accessed April 1, 2013.

⁴⁶ Puangthong Rungwasdisab, "Thailand's Response to the Cambodian Genocide."

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

prisoners and refugees.⁴⁹ The secrecy of the meeting was necessary because both governments feared that the meeting might be sabotaged by the right-wing Khmer resistance forces and “certain Thai generals” who backed them.⁵⁰

By August 1976, there were already signs that Seni Pramroj’s government was losing control over the military and the police forces. For example, at the end of August 1976, after Thai Foreign Minister Phichai officially opened the Aranyaprathet-Poipet border for private trading, the Thai Ministry of Interior ordered it closed. It was reopened only after PM Seni Pramroj intervened.⁵¹ The army-run Armored Division Radio Station also increased its verbal attacks on the communist Indochinese states. Complaints were made by some members of the Thai Parliament in mid-September that the broadcasts had “badly shattered the sentiment of those countries’ administrators and people toward Thailand, especially when the government is stepping up its efforts to improve relations with them.”⁵² The complaints disappeared later, presumably with increasing pressure from the military. Eventually, the proposed cooperation between Democratic Kampuchea and the Thai civilian governments under the Pramroj brothers came to an abrupt end when Thailand experienced a military coup in October 1976.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Larry Palmer, “Thailand’s Kampuchea Incidents,” p. 21.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 22.

⁵² Ibid.

4.4. Hostile relations between October 1976 and October 1977

On October 6, 1976, armed thugs backed by the Thai police and paramilitary forces attacked students of Thammasat University (generally considered to be leftist radicals by Thai rightist elites). Some students who attempted to escape were lynched, raped, or burnt alive. At least forty-three students along with two policemen were killed and some 8,000 students were arrested.⁵³ Using the events at Thammasat University as a pretext, a faction of the Thai military seized power later in the evening, effectively ending the precarious democratic development in Thailand during the previous three years. Thanin Kraivixien, a TV presenter and anti-communist judge from Chiang Mai, became prime minister of the new military government.⁵⁴ The coup was supported by the conservative factions of Thailand, including the Thai monarchy, conservative bureaucrats, and Thai capitalists and the middle class, who had been wary of the frequent labor strikes and students' protests since 1973 which were deemed chaotic and caused instability in the country. Even before the coup, Thanin Kraivixien had already attacked the "inseparable trio of communism, student activism and progressive politics."⁵⁵ Similarly, the military-controlled press and radio stations had also condemned the parliament as giving way to communist victory.⁵⁶ Three days after the coup, a previously confidential cable from the British Embassy in Bangkok to London reported the meeting between a senior British diplomat, Malcom McDonald, with Thai King Bhumibol of Thailand as follows:

⁵³ Chris Baker and Pasuk Phongpaichit, *A History of Thailand* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 194-195.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 195.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 194.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

He [King Bhumibol] spoke frankly, clearly indicating throughout his general approval of the military take-over ... While he had respected the idealism of the students and their right to develop “activities” of various kinds (including an interest in politics) in addition to their studies, some of the students had increasingly absorbed themselves full time in politics to the exclusion of their studies [...] searching for issues on which to overthrow the government and the establishment [...] If the choice lay between military government and student power, he, the King, though no lover of dictatorship, would much prefer the military. The students might have some ideals, but they had no experience or responsibility, and they were badly influenced from outside. The military on the other hand had a sense of discipline and responsibility, were concerned for the betterment of the country and had experience of government.⁵⁷

The October 1976 coup put an end to the brief democratic experience that Thailand underwent between 1973 and 1976. At the same time, the ascendance to power by the anti-communist military government had a negative impact on Cambodian-Thai relations as well.

Immediately after the coup, Democratic Kampuchea did not issue any official reaction, and unlike Vietnam and Laos, the DK government did not condemn the military coup and instead adopted a wait-and-see approach.⁵⁸ It should be pointed out that the former foreign minister under Kukrit’s government General Chatichai Choonhavan and his partner General Praman had also attempted a coup in October after it became clear that there was an imminent military showdown between rival factions in the Thai military. They were, however, pre-empted by a coup group led by

⁵⁷ The original cables are available as scanned pictures. See Andrew M. Marshall, “Comments by King Bhumibol on October 9, 1976,” <http://www.zenjournalist.com/2013/03/comments-by-king-bhumibol-on-october-9-1976/>. Accessed April 8, 2013.

⁵⁸ Larry Palmer, “Thailand’s Kampuchea Incidents,” p. 23.

more conservative figures such as Admiral Sangat and General Yot Thephasadin.⁵⁹ As

Larry Palmer suggested:

If the Chatichai-Praman group had moved first, relations with Kampuchea might not have been deteriorated so rapidly. Kampuchea's wait-and-see response to the coup may have been a result of Kampuchea's knowledge that different military factions had displayed different attitudes toward Kampuchea coupled with uncertainty about exactly which faction would come out on top (*sic*).⁶⁰

Soon, it became increasingly clear that the new leaders in Thailand did not wish to pursue a conciliatory approach with Democratic Kampuchea. Border incidents between the two countries became more violent and frequent. Before the 1976 coup, border clashes between Khmer Rouge and Thai armed forces had also occurred, especially along the Battambang-Aranyaprathet border, but both the Cambodian and Thai civilian governments demonstrated a certain degree of willingness to solve the border issues through diplomatic means. For instance, following the aforementioned In Tam affairs in December 1975, the then Thai Foreign Minister Chatichai and his Cambodian counterpart Ieng Sary agreed to hold a meeting in January the following year to establish a joint demarcation committee; the meeting did not occur after the situation returned to normalcy shortly afterward. Similarly, clashes between the Khmer Rouge and the Thai navy in the Gulf of Thailand in February 1976 did not escalate into diplomatic breakdown as the Thai civilian government refused to make an issue out of the incident, something the Thai military had probably hoped to use as a pretext for more armed interference against the communist Khmer Rouge regime.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Larry Palmer, "Thailand's Kampuchea Incidents," fn. no. 210, p. 23.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 17-18.

Following the October 1976 coup in Thailand, however, relations between the Khmer Rouge and the new Thai military government under Thanin Kraivixien began to rupture. As a first sign of confrontation, the new Thai government announced its plan in early November to give areas and military training to Thai peasants along the border, and claimed that the Khmer refugees had welcomed the new anti-communist government and would even possibly join the Thai army.⁶² During the following months, there were increased tensions and defensive fortifications by both sides along the border. Sabotage activities by Khmer rightist resistance forces and the Thai military occurred more frequently into areas that the Khmer Rouge considered to be Kampuchean territories.⁶³ Although there were steps initiated for negotiations to ease the tensions, as Larry Palmer remarked, they were “clearly taken in an atmosphere of less than mutual trust and good will than had been characteristic when Thailand was under civilian administration.”⁶⁴

DK-Thai relations reached rock bottom in late January 1977, when three “Thai villages” (i.e. Ban Noi Parai, Ben Nong Do, and Ben Khong Kho) were “invaded” by Khmer Rouge forces. The common news headlines around the world accepted the Thai government’s version of the event that the Khmer Rouge had invaded and committed atrocities, including the burning of Thai villages, raping women and murdering children. The Khmer Rouge reiterated that the “measures taken by the government of Democratic Kampuchea *in its own territory* (emphasis added) are answerable to the absolute sovereignty of Democratic Kampuchea,” and that the DK

⁶² Ibid., p. 23.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

government was merely “arranging its internal affairs in these three villages.”⁶⁵ The Khmer Rouge government claimed that the villages in question, known in Khmer as “Phum Kor” and “Phum Dong,” were respectively 800 and 300 meters inside Cambodian territory, while “Phum Pteah Dap Khnang” had been a part of Cambodian territory “from time immemorial.”⁶⁶

Regardless of the claims, Thailand responded the next day by closing the border and placing an embargo on exportation of “possible war material,” including fuel, medicine, ironware, and clothing to Kampuchea, with the warning to Thai traders that violation of such embargo was punishable by a death penalty.⁶⁷ In fact, in June 1977, Thanin Kraivixien’s government charged a few Thai and Khmer men with “leading the 28th January 1977 attack by Cambodian troops on the Thai villages,” smuggling “firearms, ammunition and explosives of the type used in war from Cambodian troops to terrorists in Watthana Nakhon District, Prachin Buri Province,” and/or smuggling “firearms and ammunition from Thailand to Cambodian troops” and sentenced them to death.⁶⁸ Other accomplices who had committed less serious crimes such as forging identity cards and official documents, bribing officials not to arrest suspects involved in smuggling, and/or smuggling prohibited materials, were also convicted and sentenced to 20-25 years imprisonment.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Ibid., fn. no. 263, p. 28.

⁶⁶ DC-Cam Archive file no. D28981, “Further Thai Comment on Border Incident with Cambodia,” p. 1.

⁶⁷ Larry Palmer, “Thailand’s Kampuchea Incidents,” fn. no. 263, p. 28.

⁶⁸ DC-Cam Archive file no. D29027, “Thai-Cambodian Border Smugglers Sentenced,” pp. 1-2.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

With the uses of artillery duels and air strikes, clashes along the border between the Khmer Rouge army and navy with Thailand became more frequent and escalated well into October 1977.⁷⁰

4.5. Rapprochement between October 1977 and December 1978

In the conclusion part of his article published in October 1977, Larry Palmer suggested that “The best hope for a solution to the border problem would appear to lie in a restoration of civilian rule in Bangkok. Only then would it be possible to regain the momentum toward solution which existed before the military coup.”⁷¹ He then offered a rather pessimistic scenario: “Despite factional infighting among the military cliques in Bangkok, however, a return to civilian administration, and then an end to the border fighting, seems a long way off.”⁷² Although Palmer was right in his prediction about the unlikely return of a civilian government in Thailand, his cynical remark was proven wrong by two political developments that were about to occur: i) the military coup against Thanin Kraivixien’s government by Supreme Commander of the Royal Thai Army General Kriangsak Chomanan in October 1977 in Thailand, and ii) Democratic Kampuchea’s intensifying conflicts with Vietnam.

4.5.1. Normalization with Kriangsak’s government

In October 1977, the Thai Royal Army under its Supreme Commander General Kriangsak Chomanan overthrew Thanin Kraivixien’s government amid the discontent

⁷⁰ For details about the clashes, see Larry Palmer, “Thailand’s Kampuchea Incidents,” pp. 29-31.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 31.

⁷² Ibid.

among the Thai armed forces with Thanin's (mis-)handling of the communist threat within Thailand and the region. Under his rule, the "Thanin administration had turned the country into a state of civil war."⁷³ According to Thai political scientist Puangthong Rungswasdisab, "News of the CPT's [i.e. Communist Party of Thailand's] expanding sabotage activities in rural areas and of border clashes with Cambodia as well as Laos gained daily headlines. The government's suppressive policy actually helped strengthen the CPT's popular base."⁷⁴ Indeed, following the bloody October 1976 coup and repression by Thanin's right-wing government, many students and intellectuals were prompted to join the CPT. It was estimated that, during this period, the number of CPT armed guerrillas rose to about 12,000-14,000; they had direct control over more than 400 villages and exerted influence over 6,000 villages, and managed to conduct combat operations in more than half of the country's 71 provinces against the Royal Thai Government.⁷⁵

Furthermore, Corrine Phuankasem suggested that:

Thanin's anti-communist foreign policy seemed to be an unrealistic and impractical one. His hostile policy towards all the Indochinese neighbours was considered to be the main reason for the *coup d'état* in October 1977. The coup leader wanted to remove obstacles in Thailand's *rapprochement* with its neighbours (emphasis original).⁷⁶

Initial conciliatory gestures between Democratic Kampuchea and the new Thai government under Kriangsak Chomanan took place on October 12, 1977, when DK

⁷³ Puangthong Rungswasdisab, "Thailand's Response to the Cambodian Genocide."

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Chai-anan Samudadavanija and Sukhumbhand Paribatra, "In Search of Balance: Prospects for Stability in Thailand during the Post-CPT Era," in Kusuma Snitwongse and Sukhumbhand Paribatra (eds.), *Durable Stability in Southeast Asia* (Singapore: ISEAS, 1987), p. 188.

⁷⁶ Corrine Phuankasem, "Thailand's Foreign Relations, 1964-80," p. 27.

Foreign Minister Ieng Sary met with his Thai counterpart Uppadit Pacharitangkun at the former's UN office to seek solutions to the border tensions that had become deadly during the previous year.⁷⁷ In November, the Cambodian Ministry of Foreign Affairs called for the implementation of the Cambodian-Thai Joint Communiqué which had been signed on October 31, 1975 during Ieng Sary's visit to Thailand then under Kukrit's administration.⁷⁸ On January 30, 1978, Thai Foreign Minister Uppadit Pacharitangkun and other members of the Thai delegation were invited to pay their first official visit to Democratic Kampuchea. At the banquet hosted at the State Guest House in Phnom Penh, Ieng Sary gave a welcoming speech which made repeated references to the October 1975 Cambodian-Thai Joint Communiqué and expressed optimism concerning the two nations' relations:

We are convinced that your visit to our Democratic Cambodia and the talks between our two sides will create conditions favourable for the smooth development of the friendly relations between our two countries, thus enabling Cambodia and Thailand to live peacefully as neighbours in conformity with the just aspiration of our two peoples... No matter how much we suffered in the past, our Democratic Cambodia looks only at the present and to the future and has decided to put aside the things of the past.⁷⁹

Similarly, the Thai Foreign Minister shared a similarly conciliatory remark:

The people of Thailand and the people of Democratic Cambodia are not strangers ... We must live together, because our two peoples are bound by close historical relations, a similar culture and a similar mentality. The intimacy between our two peoples is thus normally inevitable. Continuing to ignore each other's views and to stay apart from one another is tantamount to running against the historical trend, which in itself is not a recommendable act [...] it is most regrettable that that in the recent past some misunderstandings and untoward acts

⁷⁷ DC-Cam Archive file no. D29847, "Cambodian Communiqué on Cambodian-Thai Border Situation."

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ DC-Cam Archive file no. D29911, "Thai Foreign Minister in Cambodia," p. 1.

have taken place as the work of a *third party* (emphasis added).⁸⁰ I promise you that I shall make every effort to foster the friendship between our two countries. On this matter, H.E. Kriangsak Chamanan, the Thai Premier, also has this good will, that is, to see an improvement in the relations between our two countries. This is why immediately after taking office as the Premier, H.E. Kriangsak Chamanan sent a letter to H.E. Premier Pol Pot to inform the latter of his desire to forge a splendid friendship between the two countries.⁸¹

Despite both governments' expressed desires to resolve the conflict, border incidents (especially along the Ubon Ratchathani and Buriram provinces) still occurred. In mid-February 1978, Thailand's Lt-Gen Phin Keon, Head of the Information Office, Supreme Command Headquarters, noted that although efforts to normalize relations between Cambodia and Thailand had achieved a certain level of success, problems remained where he claimed "a large number of Thai villagers, their property and their cattle were taken by Khmer Rouge intruders."⁸² Yet, he did not consider the border clashes a result of a DK official foreign policy position. Instead, he attributed the border problems to several other factors "including poor contact and communication between the central government of Cambodia and its military outposts along the border, and also to the lack of effective control of the border posts by the central authorities."⁸³ However, he also suggested that:

Although border incidents ought not to affect the relations, such incidents could not be dismissed ... What we could do to protect ourselves when a border incident took place ... was to return the attack and defend our independence, sovereignty, our people's lives and property.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Although Uppadit did not explicitly say who the "third party" was, it is possible that he referred to the insurgent Communist Party of Thailand or the Khmer rightist resistance forces.

⁸¹ DC-Cam Archive file no. D29911, "Thai Foreign Minister in Cambodia," p. 3.

⁸² DC-Cam Archive file. no. D30176, "Thai Military Officials on Cambodian Border Clashes," p. 1.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

The Cambodian government, on its part, denied involvement in the alleged border incidents. Democratic Kampuchea's internal telegram No. 67 (dated April 12, 1978) reported that Thailand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs had accepted Cambodia's denial of Khmer Rouge support to the Thai communists, while the Thai military had responded that they were certain there were united Khmer Rouge and Thai communist forces.⁸⁵ The telegram further reported that Cambodia did not wish to have any problems with Thailand when they were preparing for defense against Vietnam's possible attack in April that year, and attributed the problem along the border to In Tam's activities operating on Thai soil with support from CIA-backed reactionary forces. The Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs reiterated that to their knowledge, In Tam and his family had already left for France as early as December 22, 1975. The telegram then concluded by pointing out Thailand's request for Cambodia to resolve the problem soon and their demand for the return of Thai citizens and their property which had been allegedly seized by Khmer Rouge forces.⁸⁶

On May 18, 1978, the Thai army informed the *Bangkok Post* that there had been as many as 111 incidents along the Cambodian-Thai border within the preceding four months and declared that "strong retaliatory measures had been taken after each serious clash."⁸⁷ Thailand's First Field Army Deputy Chief of Staff Col Wanchai Ruangtrakun blamed the border incidents on "local [Thai] communist terrorists" supported by the CPT, the Khmer Rouge, and the Siem Organisation – the last group

⁸⁵ DC-Cam Archive file no. D02110, "Telegram 67: We would like to report to you about the Thai Embassy's pleasure after receiving your letter."

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ DC-Cam Archive file no. D30226, "Thai Army Official on Border Incidents with Cambodia."

being described as consisting of “Thai nationals operating forays into Thailand from bases on [the] Cambodian side of the border.”⁸⁸

The conciliatory approach on the governmental level between Democratic Kampuchea and Thailand under Kriangsak, amid ongoing border clashes by different factions, continued well into late 1978, when Democratic Kampuchea was invaded by the Vietnamese army and eventually collapsed in January the following year.

4.5.2. DK-Vietnam tensions

Although the Cambodian and the Vietnamese communists had been fighting on the same side during the First and the Second Indochina Wars (1945-1975), both parties also harbored distrust toward one another, especially after Pol Pot became the Secretary of the Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK) in 1962. Pol Pot resented Vietnamese hegemonic tendencies over the CPK and was highly suspicious of Vietnam’s intention to “swallow up Cambodia” as part of its centuries-long southward and westward expansion. By the end of the 1960s, Pol Pot had established stronger direct ties with China, while he considered “solidarity” and “friendship” with Vietnam merely empty slogans.⁸⁹ Early in 1973, though still fighting against Lon Nol troops, the Khmer Rouge began to drive out the Vietnamese from Cambodian territory and at the same time started to purge Cambodian communists suspected of being pro-Vietnamese.⁹⁰ The rift between the CPK and the Vietnamese communists also took

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ben Kiernan, *How Pol Pot Came to Power: Colonialism, Nationalism, and Communism in Cambodia, 1930-1975*, 2nd edition (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), p. 297.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 357.

place within the context of the escalating fallout between China and Vietnam during the first half of the 1970s.⁹¹ By September 1974, all references to solidarity with Vietnam had been deleted from the CPK Centre's Party History.⁹²

Open armed conflicts, however, emerged after Democratic Kampuchea had completely toppled the Khmer Republic. Clashes between Khmer Rouge forces and the Vietnamese communists took place in May 1975 in the Gulf of Thailand over several islands and disputed maritime borders (with presumed offshore oil deposits) whose ownership was claimed by both countries. Following the maritime border conflicts, there were attempted negotiations between both sides but to no avail, as the Cambodians now claimed that the Vietnamese presented a new map "which took away a vast part of Cambodia's territory."⁹³ During 1977, Democratic Kampuchea's border clashes with Thailand were widely published in the international press, while tensions with Vietnam were not yet publicized. Yet, Karl Jackson observed that:

While the largest conflicts on the Thai border involved only a few hundred Khmer Rouge regulars at any given time, warfare along the Vietnamese frontier included pitched, multiple battalion battles with the Vietnamese using tanks, artillery, and jet aircraft against their 'fraternal socialist' neighbors.⁹⁴

At the end of 1977, Cambodia broke off diplomatic relations with Vietnam. By early 1978, the Head of State Presidium of Democratic Kampuchea Khieu Samphan even

⁹¹ As a result of the Cultural Revolution, China faced economic troubles at home and subsequently reduced its aid to Vietnam after the signing of the Paris Peace Agreement in early 1973, especially when China was concerned about Vietnam's "wasteful use" of its aid. Vietnam, on the other hand, doubted China's sincerity about its economic difficulty and resented China's delay in transferring Soviet aid to Vietnam via China. Eventually, Vietnam would form closer ties with China's emerging rival – the Soviet Union. See Kosal Path, "The Economic Factor in the Sino-Vietnamese Split, 1972–75: An analysis of Vietnamese Archival Sources," *Cold War History, iFirst Article* (2011): pp. 1-37.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 368.

⁹³ Joseph R. Pouvachy, "Cambodian-Vietnamese Relations," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 26, No. 4. (Apr., 1986): p. 447.

⁹⁴ Karl D. Jackson, "Cambodia 1977: Gone to Pot," *Asia Survey*, Vol. 18, No. 1. (Jan., 1978): p. 82.

declared that: “the number one enemy is not U.S. imperialism, but Vietnam, ready to swallow up Cambodia.”⁹⁵ In September 1978, the Department of Press and Information of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Democratic Kampuchea published the *Black Paper* (more commonly known by its French title *Livre Noir*), in which they detailed “Vietnam’s attempt to annex Cambodia” during the past few centuries.⁹⁶ Likewise, the February 1978 issue of the *Revolutionary Flag* magazines (published for Khmer Rouge cadres), which had normally reported on agricultural activities, now turned its attention to boast the capacity of the Revolutionary Army of Kampuchea for defending against the “aggressor, expansionist, territory-swallowing Yuon.”⁹⁷

Although Democratic Kampuchea generally claimed it wanted to protect Cambodian territory against the Vietnamese, international observers generally gave consensus accounts about the Khmer Rouge’s brutal attacks into Vietnam, destroying several Vietnamese villages and massacring hundreds of Vietnamese civilians.⁹⁸ Pursuing an irredentist policy, Democratic Kampuchea even attempted to reclaim *Kampuchea Krom* (Cochin-China) in southern Vietnam.⁹⁹ In the secret document drafted in June 1977 by the DK foreign ministry titled “History of the Kampuchea-Vietnam War,” the past losses of Cambodian territories were blamed on the “royal and feudal

⁹⁵ Joseph R. Pouvachy, “Cambodian-Vietnamese Relations,” p. 447.

⁹⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Democratic Kampuchea, *Black Paper: Facts and Evidences of the Acts of Aggression and Annexation of Vietnam against Kampuchea* (Kampuchea: September 1978).

⁹⁷ The term “yuon” is a Khmer word referring to ethnic Vietnamese. Though originally a neutral term, it had been sometimes used with negative connotations and became a controversial term in Cambodian contemporary politics. During the 1980s when Cambodia was under Vietnamese occupation, to be politically correct, Cambodians had to use the word “Vietnam” instead of “Yuon.” For discussion about Cambodian perception(s) toward ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia, see Sodany Tan, “Attitudes of the Cambodian People toward the Vietnamese: A Case Study of Young Educated Cambodians” (M.A. thesis, Chulalongkorn University, 2006).

⁹⁸ See Ben Kiernan, *The Pol Pot Regime*, pp. 357-360.

⁹⁹ *Kampuchea Krom*, literally “Lower Cambodia,” was formerly Cambodian territory but had since the 17th century received an influx of Vietnamese settlements. It was finally granted to Vietnam in June 1949 by the French protectorate.

authorities” along with the French colonialists. As such, the DK army would resolve “to defend its entire ancient territory.”¹⁰⁰ In September 1977, the Khmer Rouge again raided Vietnamese villages. According to the *Keesing’s Contemporary Archives* (later renamed *Keesing’s World News Archives*), as cited by Ben Kiernan:

The Vietnamese document of 6 January 1978, which was supported by reports from U.S. intelligence sources, stated that from September 24 onwards Cambodian forces totaling about four divisions had launched continuous attacks along the entire border of Tay Ninh province [of Vietnam], and that over 1,000 civilians had been killed or wounded in this area between September 24 and late November.¹⁰¹

Following the Khmer Rouge raids, the Vietnamese army retaliated sometime in late September or early October and penetrated several kilometers into eastern parts of Cambodia. For the next few months, the Vietnamese troops (together with some former Khmer Rouge cadres who had defected) would launch occasional attacks on Khmer Rouge forces inside the Cambodian border, before retreating back to Vietnam in January 1978.¹⁰² Pol Pot’s growing suspicion of rebellion and coups against him resulted in the increasing purges of many East Zone cadres whom he feared might have cooperated with the Vietnamese. The recently published Closing Order of Case 002 of the Extraordinary Chamber in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC; a.k.a. Khmer Rouge Tribunal) reported that “in December 1978, some 300 prisoners from the East Zone who had been accused of rebellion were sent directly to [the] Choeng Ek [killing fields] and executed.”¹⁰³ Out of more than 12,000 prisoners at the infamous *Tuol Sleng* Prison (a.k.a. S-21 Security Center), at least 345 detainees were described

¹⁰⁰ Ben Kiernan, *The Pol Pot Regime*, pp., pp. 360-361.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 361.

¹⁰² Ibid., pp. 374-376.

¹⁰³ Extraordinary Chamber in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC), “Closing Order (Indictment) in Case 002” (2010), p. 120. <http://www.eccc.gov.kh/sites/default/files/documents/court/DOC/D427Eng.pdf>. Accessed April 30, 2013.

as Vietnamese, making them the majority group among all the foreign nationals held at the prison (and later executed there or at Choeng Ek).¹⁰⁴ Most of the detainees at *Tuol Sleng* were generally pre-determined to be guilty and forced to “confess” to have worked for the CIA or the Soviet intelligence agency KGB earlier in their careers, and/or for the Vietnamese.¹⁰⁵

In reference to the situations in the East Zone during 1978, Khamboly Dy of the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam) wrote:

The worst purges in the zone occurred in 1978 after some units rebelled against the DK government. From June to September, while warfare continued with Vietnam, much of the East Zone became a battlefield between the DK government and these rebellious troops, and as many as 100,000 people in the East Zone died in battle or were executed. The government sent troops from the Southeast Zone to fight the rebels. Thousands of people fled to the Vietnamese border to escape the killings that followed the arrival of these troops.¹⁰⁶

At the end of 1978, the Vietnamese launched a full-scale invasion of Kampuchea. In just two weeks’ time, the Khmer Rouge lost control of Phnom Penh and fled west to the Thai border, culminating in the eventual Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia during the 1980s.

It must be noted that Democratic Kampuchea’s intensified border tensions with Vietnam between late 1977 and early 1979 occurred at a time when the former was seeking rapprochement with the new Thai government under Kriangsak, at least on a

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 112.

¹⁰⁵ For a comprehensive academic discussion on DK security politics and purging, see David Chandler, *Voices from S-21: Terror and History in Pol Pot’s Secret Prison* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1999).

¹⁰⁶ Dy Khamboly, *A History of Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979)* (Phnom Penh: Documentation Center of Cambodia, 2007), p. 39.

governmental level, as discussed earlier. Although the Khmer Rouge forces continued to have skirmishes along the border with their Thai counterparts, the two governments' conciliatory approach was laying the groundwork for more cooperation, especially after the fall of Phnom Penh to the Vietnamese in January 1979. Thailand's full-fledged cooperation with the Khmer Rouge during the 1980s shall be the discussion in the next chapter.

4.6. Conclusion

When the Khmer Rouge took power in Cambodia in April 1975, the new communist regime was immediately recognized by Thailand. The Thai government under Kukrit was a democratically-elected civilian government which had come to power not long after the Thai right-wing military government was pressured to step down by mass student-led protests in October 1973. Though conservative, Kukrit's government responded to the Thai popular sentiment that wished to see Thailand disengage from the Vietnam War and avoid hostilities with neighboring countries. Thailand also readjusted its foreign policy by normalizing relations with the People's Republic of China (a major ally of the Khmer Rouge) and reducing its military ties with the U.S. The shift of policy was hastened after the May 1975 *Mayaguez* affair, in which the U.S. ignored Thailand's sovereignty and launched operations from American military bases in Thailand to reclaim the freighter seized earlier by the Khmer Rouge in the Gulf of Thailand. When the operations became public knowledge, even the Thai military who had been allies of the U.S. could not intervene to stop Kukrit's government from demanding the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Thailand. From

April 1975 to October 1976, relations between Democratic Kampuchea and the Thai civilian governments (under Kukrit and later Seni Pramoj) could be described as neutral and non-confrontational. Although there was no establishment of embassies as initially planned, border trades continued. The border skirmishes during this time occurred between the Khmer Rouge and the Khmer rightist resistance forces who were being supported by some factions within the Thai military and the Thai Border Patrol Police. Between October 1976 and October 1977, however, border tensions intensified following the military coup in Thailand which brought about a sturdily anti-communist military government under Thanin Kraivixien. Both sides now accused each other of violating each other's territorial sovereignty. Conciliation occurred again after another coup in Thailand replaced the Thanin's right-wing government with a more moderate government under Kraingsak Chomanan. Even if border skirmishes still occurred occasionally, both governments showed mutual interest and intention to normalize their relations and settle their disputes through peaceful mechanisms. With encouragement from China, the conciliation process became even more desirable after Cambodia was engulfed in border conflicts with its now "number one enemy" – the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. When Vietnam finally took over Phnom Penh in January 1979, the Khmer Rouge fled west and embarked on an even stronger tactical alliance with the Thai military government to counter the Vietnamese.

The empirical discussion in this chapter confirmed the postulation of the "social conflict" analytical framework, i.e. the necessity to view foreign relations as a result of competing domestic forces, each viewing external actors as either a threat or

opportunity depending on their ideology, strategy and interest. The most important factor that affected Cambodian-Thai relations during the second half of the 1970s was the changes of government in Thailand. Although the Khmer Rouge government was communist, it pursued neutralist foreign policy toward Thailand. Democratic Kampuchea's foreign relations with Thailand took several turns not due to a dramatic shift in the international balance of power (i.e. the U.S. withdrawal from the region), but to the changes of different governments in Thailand. The civilian government under Kukrit presided over a power base that had opposed an interventionist (and pro-U.S.) foreign policy outlook. It was therefore not considered a threat to the Khmer Rouge regime, and vice versa. When the right-wing government under Thanin Kraivixien was in power, Thailand's relations with Democratic Kampuchea were ruptured. Not only did Thanin's government adopt an anti-communist stance domestically, it also supported the Khmer right-wing resistance forces against the Khmer Rouge regime, while accusing Democratic Kampuchea of supporting the Thai communists as well. Once Kriangsak's relatively more moderate government replaced Thanin's in late 1977, mutual suspicions gradually subsided, and cooperation was not only possible, but was deemed necessary when Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia in late 1978 created mutual security concerns for both Thailand and the Khmer Rouge. This cooperation shall be discussed in the next chapter.

Likewise, although nationalism (or even irredentism) was at some point a policy pursued by Democratic Kampuchea, it only occurred within the context of the strained relationships between the Khmer Rouge and the anti-communist Thai military, particularly between October 1976 and late 1977. As argued elsewhere, nationalism

was not a constant factor that affected Cambodian-Thai relations, but only became an issue when it was invoked to bolster domestic support against the other government whose ideology and/or strategic interests were at odds with its own. Evidently, nationalism did not emerge as a problem between Democratic Kampuchea and the civilian or the moderate governments of Thailand, but only with the strongly anti-communist regime under Thanin Kraivixien. In fact, by early 1978, the Khmer Rouge had adopted a staunchly nationalistic stance, not against Thailand, but against Vietnam. In spite of their shared communist ideology, the Khmer Rouge regime under Pol Pot had resented Vietnam's attempt to subordinate the Communist Party of Kampuchea to its Vietnamese counterpart and feared that Vietnam was strategically attempting to annex Cambodia. More importantly, Pol Pot's profound suspicion that the Vietnamese were backing a coup in Cambodia by supporting other Khmer Rouge factions along the border finally led to the open clashes between the two sides, during which Pol Pot highly invoked Khmer nationalism against the Vietnamese and resorted to incessant propaganda about Vietnamese historical mistreatment of the Khmer.

The next chapter will examine how the shift of foreign policies (as securitization measures and threat perceptions by various competing societal groups) took place within the context of intensifying factional politics, especially among the Cambodians, and how that in turn shaped Cambodia-Thailand diplomatic relations during the 1980s. The issue of conflicting nationalism(s) among these various groups will also be discussed.

Chapter 5: The People's Republic of Kampuchea period (1979-1991)

5.1. Introduction

On December 25, 1978, the Kampuchean United Front for National Salvation (KUFNS) of about 20,000 militiamen, backed by some 150,000 People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN) soldiers, tanks and air force, launched their attacks on the Khmer Rouge soldiers along the eastern fronts and advanced all the way to Phnom Penh. Unprepared for and unable to counter the attacks, the top brass leaders of Democratic Kampuchea fled the capital for the Thai border. On January 7, 1979, Phnom Penh was effectively taken over by the KUFNS and the PAVN. Four days after the victory, the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) was officially proclaimed. Alarmed by the presence of more than 150,000 Vietnamese troops next door (Vietnam had also stationed about 50,000 troops in Laos), Thailand decided to support the Khmer Rouge (and other Khmer resistance factions) to counter the "Vietnamese threat." Thus began another period of contentious relations between Cambodia and Thailand, but this time involving several factions in the conflict on the Cambodian side. Likewise, gradual social and economic changes throughout the 1980s also gave rise to a new political force in Thailand by end of the decade, and thereby prompted a shift in Cambodia-Thailand relations at the time.

This chapter examines diplomatic relations between Cambodia and Thailand during the 1980s within the context of the Third Indochina War (1979-1991). Although regional and global factors are discussed, the chapter takes a closer look at the

domestic factors, which tend to be overlooked by scholars who study Cambodia-Thailand Relations. Specifically, the chapter seeks to explain why Thailand chose to confront the Vietnamese-backed PRK regime between 1979 and 1988, and why conciliatory policies was adopted after 1988. The changes in socio-economic and political developments in Thailand which in turn influenced the way threat and security related to the “Kampuchean Crisis” were perceived by different Thai governments are discussed. Similarly, the different ideologies and interests of the competing Cambodian political factions, as well as their different notions of “nationalism” are also explored.

5.2. The Third Indochina War

Following the liberation of Phnom Penh, Hanoi proclaimed the establishment of the People’s Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) on January 11, 1979. Installed by Vietnam, the PRK was promptly recognized by the Soviet Union, and later on by other socialist countries in the Eastern Bloc. Countries that were strongly opposed to the PRK and the Vietnamese invasion of Democratic Kampuchea included Thailand, China, the United States, and the ASEAN founding member states. Branded a puppet regime of Vietnam, the PRK was not granted legitimacy at the United Nations, while the majority of the UN General Assembly members voted to retain the seat for the now ousted government of Democratic Kampuchea. The only non-communist country to recognize the PRK was India.¹

¹ According to Alice Jose, “Though the official recognition was the logical continuation of electoral promise of the Indian National Congress, India's policy was based on the conviction that its interests in Southeast Asia were best served by cooperation with other middle powers such as Vietnam and by offering a third path to new countries rather by acquiescing in great power domination of smaller

Vietnam's invasion of Democratic Kampuchea alarmed China to a great extent. As Sophie Richardson observed, "Beijing clearly perceived the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia as a threat not only to regional security, but also as confirmation of China's long-standing suspicions about Soviet hegemony."² Starting from mid-February 1979, China launched attacks on northern Vietnam to "teach Vietnam a lesson" for invading Cambodia. On February 17, about 80,000 of the total 300,000 Chinese troops amassed along the China-Vietnam border were sent into Vietnam, where they were met by 75,000-100,000 Vietnamese troops.³ By the time the Chinese troops withdrew more than a month later, the casualties of China's punitive attacks on Vietnam are estimated at 25,000 Chinese and 20,000 Vietnamese dead.⁴ Assured of Soviet support, Vietnam, however, determined to stay in Cambodia. As political scientist Sorpong Peou suggested, "[Although] Hanoi may not have had a grand strategy to create an "Indochina Federation" under its current leadership as is often alleged by its enemies and critics [...] the Vietnamese leadership definitely wanted an Indochina that would come under its influence."⁵ For its part, the Soviet Union helped shoulder Vietnam's cost for occupying Cambodia by providing billions of dollars worth of aid throughout the 1980s.

powers. India believed that Vietnam was an independent country which had fought for its independence for nearly three decades and that far from being a Soviet stooge, the country could prove to be a buffer against Chinese expansionist designs in the region. India considered that if there was a country which could stand up against the hegemonistic designs of Beijing, it was Vietnam." Alice Jose, "Continuity and Change in India's Cambodia Policy" (PhD diss., Mahatma Gandhi University, 1993), p. 318.

² Sophie D. Richardson, "China, Cambodia, and the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence: Princes and Foreign Policy" (PhD diss., University of Virginia, 2005), p. 174.

³ Brantly Womack, *China and Vietnam: The Politics of Asymmetry* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 200.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Sorpong Peou, *Intervention and Change in Cambodia: Towards Democracy?* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2000), p. 135.

For the U.S. administration under Jimmy Carter, Vietnam's invasion of Kampuchea was simply interpreted as an extension of Soviet hegemonic influence in Southeast Asia. American historian Kenton Clymer wrote:

When Vietnam invaded Cambodia, the United States condemned the act, arguing hypocritically that it could not in principle “condone or support the use of military forces outside of one’s own territory.” Even the Khmer Rouge regime’s “unparalleled crimes,” the Americans told the Vietnamese, did not justify a “military invasion violation of Kampuchean sovereignty and replacement of that government by force.”⁶

When asked during Deng Xiaoping’s visit to Washington, D. C. in January 1979 about his view on China’s possible “punitive strike against the Vietnamese,” Carter discouraged the plan but, in the words of his National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski, “did not lock the United States into a position which could generate later pressures to condemn China in the UN.”⁷ Instead of recognizing the People’s Republic of Kampuchea, the U.S. would provide aid to Cambodian refugees along the border and offered indirect financial support to the non-communist Khmer resistance forces.

The ASEAN member states’ responses to the Vietnamese invasion of Democratic Kampuchea were not unanimous, at least not at the beginning. While Indonesia initially issued mild and non-condemnatory statements (perhaps thanks to its earlier invasion of East Timor in 1975, and that it might have shared similar reasoning with Malaysia in seeing Hanoi as a counter force against Chinese hegemony), Singapore,

⁶ Kenton Clymer, *The United States and Cambodia, 1969-2000: A Troubled Relationship* (London & New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), p. 119.

⁷ Ibid.

the Philippines, and Thailand in particular, showed stronger opposition to Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia.

While analysts in the realist strands generally attributed the ASEAN states' concerns to the shifting balance of power,⁸ constructivists tend to view ASEAN's stance on this issue as a concern of Vietnam's violation of ASEAN's norms and doctrines on non-interference and non-uses of force.⁹ Lee Jones, however, pointed to the ASEAN leaders' fear of the negative impacts Vietnam's invasion might have had on the insurgency movements within their own polities. He argued convincingly that:

ASEAN's threat perceptions in fact turned on the likely consequences of the invasion for the balance of forces within their own societies ... ASEAN's ruling elites had welcomed the emergence of internal divisions within Indochina after 1975, because it distracted the victorious communist from assisting their fellow-travellers within ASEAN societies. The Indochinese states and China had all reduced their support for the CPT [i.e. Communist Party of Thailand] in order to ingratiate themselves with Thailand, and Cambodia under Pol Pot was seen as a useful 'buffer' against any Vietnamese plans to foment revolution abroad. The sudden removal of this buffer was, consequently, profoundly alarming.¹⁰

5.3. Thailand as the "frontline state"

As mentioned in the previous chapter, while Democratic Kampuchea's relationship with Vietnam was deteriorating during 1978, its relationship with Thailand was gradually moving toward normalization, despite occasional skirmishes along the

⁸ See, for example, Michael Leifer, *ASEAN and the Security of Southeast Asia* (London: Routledge, 1989).

⁹ See A. Acharya, *Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia: ASEAN and the Problem of Regional Order*, 2nd edition (London: Routledge, 2009).

¹⁰ Lee Jones, *ASEAN, Sovereignty and Intervention in Southeast Asia* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 97.

Cambodia-Thailand border. The large-scale Vietnamese invasion into Cambodia in late December eventually helped foster even stronger ties between the Khmer Rouge and the Thai government, especially during Prem Tinsulanon's rule (1980-1988) in Thailand. A few factors accounted for such re-alignment.

At the outset of the conflict in 1979, Thailand was still ruled by the military under PM Kriangsak Chomanan. Likewise, the Thai military still dominated foreign-policy making in the country. In 1980, Kriangsak was replaced by Prem Tinsulanond, a Privy Council member who was also from the military ranks. Although the Thai military by then did not enjoy the same level of political power as it had before 1973, the Thai armed forces were still able to preserve their autonomy in certain areas:

One is defense budgeting and arms procurement decisions. Another is preparations for and conduct of security operations. The third is the formulation, development and operation of security apparatus, paramilitary units and security-oriented grassroots programmes and organizations. The fourth is the appointment of personnel to key security and security-related positions. This in turn means that the Thai military's perceptions of security and politics still play a crucial or even decisive role in the formulation and implementation of all security policies and programmes.¹¹

Furthermore, according to historians Chris Baker and Pasuk Phongpaichit, "Under the new constitution, parliament was controlled through an appointive Senate packed with military men [...] Other key ministries (defense, interior, finance, foreign) were

¹¹ Sukhumbhand Paribatra, "Thailand: Defence Spending and Threat Perceptions" in Chin Kin Wah (ed.), *Defence Spending in Southeast Asia* (Singapore: ISEAS, National University of Singapore, 1987), p. 83. In addition to these spheres of influence, a few other institutions and agencies were either directly controlled or closely related to the military, including the Senate, the International Security Operations Command (ISOC), the National Defence Volunteers, and Village Scouts. See *ibid.*, p. 84.

reserved for military men and a few trusted technocrats.”¹² The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for instance, was headed by Air Chief Marshal Siddhi Savetsila, who advocated a tough line against Vietnam’s occupation of Cambodia. For Thailand’s military leadership under Prem Tinsulanond (or “Premocracy” as it was known), the sudden influx of some 150,000 Vietnamese soldiers next to Thailand’s border created a perceived threat to its national security. From the beginning of this “Kampuchean Crisis,” Thailand considered itself the frontline state in the conflict. Thai military leaders were especially concerned about possible spillover effects of the invasion, including:

armed tension along the Thai-Kampuchean border, refugee influx, an unnecessary drain on the national resources, transformation of Kampuchea into a base for threatening Thailand’s sovereignty and territorial integrity, aggravation of regional tension and intensification of greatpower (*sic*) rivalry in Southeast Asia.¹³

Yet, while realists view Thailand’s foreign policy vis-à-vis Vietnam and the PRK as a reaction to the shift of a regional balance of power, other domestic factors were significant in shaping Thailand’s foreign policy during this period. Most important among the domestic concerns was the ongoing insurgency of the Communist Party of Thailand. Thailand’s normalized relations with China (which had taken place since the U.S. withdrawal from Southeast Asia after 1975) not only facilitated a *de-facto* alliance between the two states in response to the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia,

¹² Chris Baker and Pasuk Phongpaichit, *A History of Thailand* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 234.

¹³ Sukhumbhand Paribatra, “The Enduring Logic in Thai Foreign Policy and National Security Interests: Implications for the 1980s and Beyond,” *Institute of Security and International Studies* (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University, 1984), p. 8. For the survey on Thai elite’s perception on Thailand’s security, see Kamol Tongdhammachart *et. al.*, “The Thai Elite’s National Security Perspectives: Implications for Southeast Asia,” *Institute of Security and International Studies* (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University, 1984).

but it also had a more remarkable effect of undermining the strength of the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT). In the words of Ansil Ramsay: “the Vietnamese occupation of Kampuchea has proved less threatening than anticipated and has had the enormous unexpected bonus of crippling the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT).”¹⁴ After the Vietnamese invasion into Cambodia, “the CPT lost sanctuaries in Laos and Kampuchea and has had to grapple with difficult ideological issues stemming from Chinese support for the Thai government as well as the conflict between China and the Soviet Union.”¹⁵ Coupled with its own internal division and successful efforts on the part of the Thai government to improve economic development in the restive areas (especially the northeast), the CPT’s armed strength plummeted from some 12,000 armed men in 1979 to only about 3,000 to 4,000 in 1984.¹⁶

Furthermore, a study by Sukhumbhand Paribatra on Thailand’s defense spending between 1975 and 1986 seems to suggest that although the military budget in this period appeared to correspond to overall threat perceptions (an annual share of about 20% of the total government budget), the immediate increase between 1975 and 1976 were “unusual” because it took place at a time “when the Thai military’s power and prestige were at their nadir and democratically elected governments were in power,” and therefore, he argued, “it seems fair to conclude that internal power equations, rather than threat perceptions, are the more influential determinants of the RTG’s [Royal Thai Government’s] defence spending.”¹⁷ Likewise, the budgeting behavior during this period appeared to be “too regular, and too predictable, as if the allocation

¹⁴ Ansil Ramsay, “Thai Domestic Politics and Foreign Policy,” *the Third U.S.-ASEAN Conference* (Chiangmai, Thailand, 1985), p. 2.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 20

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Sukhumbhand Paribatra, “Thailand: Defence Spending and Threat Perceptions,” p. 95.

process has been routinized to perfection and worked out from *a priori* assumptions which have little to do with threat perceptions.”¹⁸ In addition, according to Sukhumbhand:

[...] the *pattern* of Thai arms purchases has been unchanging since 1976-1977 even though the nature of perceived threats has changed somewhat. The emphasis was and still remains overwhelmingly on building up *conventional capabilities* for *all the three armed forces at the same time* (emphasis original). This means that there is a divergence between arms purchases and the perceptions of threats. In the mid-to-late 1970s when the insurgency problem was considered to be very serious and Vietnam had not invaded Cambodia, the RGT decided to buy F-5E fighter aircraft, *Sidewinder* and *Exocet* missiles, and *Scorpion* and M-48 tanks. In the mid-1980s when [...] the military threat from Vietnam is thought to be mainly in the form of land-based border incursions, most of the capital outlay for the country's procurement programme has been concentrated on advanced weapons which are primarily not for use in land-based operations.¹⁹

Taken together, it is reasonable to suggest that the Thai military's stance toward the Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia was driven as much by domestic factors (i.e. undermining the CPT insurgency and retaining its own autonomy and positional power) as it was by external security threats on Thailand as a whole.

It should be emphasized once again that from the beginning it was the Thai military that was responsible for formulating foreign policy toward Vietnam's invasion and occupation of Kampuchea. In other words, security threats to Thailand were not an objective reality of threat, but was the product of the military elites' perceptions and calculations of domestic and regional security at the time. This was especially evident when some Thai academics and some members within the Thai Foreign Ministry

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 99.

¹⁹ Ibid.

voiced opinions that Vietnam's threat to Thailand was exaggerated and that Thailand should reformulate its foreign policy toward Indochina as a way to alleviate the tensions in Indochina.²⁰

As Thailand was a major backer, logistically and diplomatically, of the coalition government of the Khmer resistance forces (discussed in section 5.6.), the issue of Khmer-Thai antagonism based on nationalism did not surface at all during this period. Instead, it was Vietnam as a "traditional enemy of Cambodia" that dominated the discourse of these resistance forces.

5.4. The PRK and its limited choices in foreign policy making

Unlike Thailand, the PRK government had limited choices in foreign policy as it remained under Vietnam's occupation. Kampuchean-Thai relations during the 1980s, therefore, could not be understood separately without examining the foreign policy of Vietnam itself. Nonetheless, it is worth examining the domestic factors and main players within the PRK as well.

The Kampuchean United Front for National Salvation officially came into existence on December 2, 1978 in Snoul, Kratie Province. It was led by Heng Samrin, a former a Khmer Rouge commander from the East Zone who had defected to Vietnam in 1978 following the border tensions between Democratic Kampuchea and Vietnam, and Pol

²⁰ Institute of Asian Studies, "Thailand's Policy Towards the Vietnam-Kampuchea Conflict: Issues on Thai National Interest, Policy Objectives and Alternatives on the Kampuchean Problem as seen by the Thai Foreign Ministry Officials and the Academics," *Asian Studies Monographs No. 032* (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University, 1985).

Pot's purges of the East Zone cadres. He served as the nominal President of the PRK and the State of Cambodia (1989-1991) until the Paris Peace Agreement was signed in October 1991. Other former Khmer Rouge cadres who filled in the top brass leadership of the PRK government included Chea Sim (interior minister) and Hun Sen (foreign minister and later prime minister). The other faction was comprised of the Khmer Issarak veterans, or the so-called "Khmer Viet Minh," who had stayed and taken refuge in Vietnam since 1954 (some of whom returned to Cambodia in 1970 but were purged by Pol Pot's faction). They included, among others, Pen Sovann (PRK's vice president and first premier), Keo Chenda (information minister), Mok Sakun (economy minister) and Nou Beng (health minister).²¹

In spite of the different backgrounds of the PRK's leadership, political scientist Sorpong Peou characterized the PRK as a "socialist dictatorship" (as supposed to Democratic Kampuchea's "revolutionary totalitarianism"), because the PRK:

did not employ terrorism to achieve perfect harmony among political leaders, the party, and the people, despite its adherence to communist ideology. What the political leadership did was to establish a socialist system in which power was near total. No multi-party electoral competition was permitted.²²

Likewise, historian Michael Vickery rightly argued:

Although the goal of the Vietnamese and their Cambodian allies in 1979 was to overthrow DK, this was not for the purpose of effecting a counterrevolution and restoring pre-war society. Both the Vietnamese and the new PRK leaders believed in socialism, though without the

²¹ See Margaret Slocomb, *The People's Republic of Kampuchea 1979—1989: The Revolution after Pol Pot* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2003), pp. 45-52.

²² Sorpong Peou, *Intervention and Change in Cambodia*, p. 63.

excesses of DK and there was the intention that wide class differences should not redevelop.²³

Nonetheless, the person who was most weary of Vietnam was Prime Minister Pen Sovann, who strongly opposed the latter's hegemonic control over Cambodia's domestic issues and foreign policies. Pen Sovann was particularly opposed to Vietnam's policy of permitting the unrestricted flow of Vietnamese immigrants into Cambodia, as well as Vietnam's disrespect for Cambodia's sovereignty. While Vietnam considered the PRK its protégé, Sovann attempted to have equal footings with the Vietnamese. In addition, he also wanted to bypass Vietnam's control and establish direct contact with the Soviet Union. It is generally believed that his removal in late 1981 and his decade-long imprisonment in a dark cell in Vietnam between 1982 and 1991 was a result of his insubordination toward Vietnam. Hun Sen, however, justified Pen Sovann's arrest on the latter's unpopularity within the party and untimely demand for the withdrawal of the Vietnamese troops at a time when the PRK was still fragile and was under continuing threat from the Khmer Rouge.²⁴ A more moderate figure, Chan Si, succeeded Pen Sovann and served as premier until 1985, when he passed away and was rumored to have been murdered for his opposition to Vietnam's "K5 Plan" (discussed in the next section). When Hun Sen succeeded Chan Si as prime minister, he was seen by many as a collaborator with the Vietnamese, even to the disappointment among some officials within the PRK (including the current Minister of Foreign Affairs Hor Namhong, who served as the PRK ambassador to the Soviet Union during the 1980s, on the issue of Cambodia-

²³ Michael Vickery, *Kampuchea: Politics, Economics and Society* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 1986), p. 54.

²⁴ See Sophal Chhay, *Hun Sen: Politics and Power in the Khmer History for over 40 Years* (Phnom Penh, 2012), pp. 92-98.

Vietnam border agreements).²⁵ Like any other regimes, the PRK was not politically homogeneous. But due to Vietnam's control, the foreign policy of the PRK during the 1980s was by and large dictated by Vietnam's geo-political interests.

In the preface to his book *Cambodia after the Khmer Rouge*, Evan Gottesman rightly observed that: "As for Cambodia's new leaders [i.e. the PRK leaders], put to work in an empty capital overgrown with weeds, they kept calling what they were doing a 'revolution.' But there was nothing to overturn, just an emptiness to fill."²⁶ A major task for the PRK during its early administration was to care for a population that resembled the walking dead crisscrossing the country looking for lost relatives or returning to their hometown.²⁷ The PRK constitution promulgated in June 1981 restored basic rights, including the rights to practice religion and freedom of speech. Such rights, however, were also curtailed to guarantee that they did not threaten the "security of the state." The constitution also pointed out that the republic would be "moving step by step toward socialism." In the realm of commerce, for instance, the state was empowered to have monopoly over international trade. In terms of foreign policy, the constitution declared "independence, peace, and neutrality." Specifically, however, Cambodia would also tighten "the bonds of solidarity and cooperation with Vietnam, Laos, and the Soviet Union, and other fraternal socialist countries."²⁸ Furthermore, the Kampuchean People's Revolutionary Party (KPRP) that steered the

²⁵ See Evan Gottesman, *Cambodia after the Khmer Rouge* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), p. 209.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. x.

²⁷ For discussion on the re-emergence of people's lives in urban and rural areas after 1979, see Sok Udom Deth, "The People's Republic of Kampuchea: A Draconian Savior?," (M.A. thesis, Ohio University, 2009).

²⁸ For detailed discussion on the PRK constitution, see Michael Vickery, *Kampuchea: Politics, Economics and Society*, Chapter 7, pp. 89-92.

PRK leadership dated its party history to 1951, as struggling alongside the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) against French colonial rule. Unlike the Communist Party of Kampuchea under Pol Pot, the KPRP did not mention historical relations with the Communist Party of China and the Communist Party of Thailand.²⁹

Not surprisingly, the PRK's efforts were especially difficult during the initial years, when the country was torn by war and famine. Furthermore, it did not help that as the PRK was not recognized by the international community and was therefore denied international development assistance, besides limited emergency relief aids from a few organizations, including UNICEF and the Red Cross. It is in this context that Eva Mysliwiec, an NGO worker during the PRK rule (and had continued to work in Cambodia until very recently), published her book titled *Punishing the Poor: The International Isolation of Kampuchea*, in which she argues: "It is as if the Kampuchean people were being punished for the Vietnamese presence in their country. On the one hand, they are accused of being puppets of Vietnam; on the other, by isolating Kampuchea, Western nations are creating a self-fulfilling prophecy."³⁰

She also argued that:

It is within the power of the Western and ASEAN nations and China to stop the killing now. If Vietnam withdrew its forces from Kampuchea tomorrow the Khmer Rouge leaders responsible for atrocities between 1975-78 would be likely to seize power. On the other hand, if support for the coalition ended tomorrow, the killing would cease but there could be disagreement over the timetable for Vietnamese withdrawal.³¹

²⁹ For historiography of the KPRP, see K. Viviane Frings, "Rewriting Cambodian History to 'Adapt' It to a New Political Context: The Kampuchean People's Revolutionary Party's Historiography (1979-1991)," *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 4 (Oct., 1997): pp. 807-846.

³⁰ Eva Mysliwiec. *Punishing the Poor: The International Isolation of Kampuchea* (Oxford, UK: Oxfam, 1988), p. ix.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

According to some calculations, “Total aid from the United Nations in 1986 was \$142 per head for the 300,000 on the border, but only \$1.50 per head for the 7 million inside Cambodia itself (supplemented by a further \$1.50 per head from international NGOs).”³² Without significant international aid (Vietnam claimed to provide a combined 25 million dollars in military and commodity aid annually),³³ the PRK administration had little choice but to allow the Cambodian population to engage in black market trading with Thailand. Basic items such as rice, cooking utensils, and simple electronic products, were smuggled across the borders with tacit approval from local authorities who took the opportunity to engage themselves in “revenue-generating plans of differing types ... checkpoints on roads used for transporting goods in order to collect some money or seize and confiscate goods and use them however they wish and without any policy.”³⁴ But as I had written elsewhere:

The PRK and their advisors who harbored deep qualms about the re-emergence of capitalism understood that the Thai-Cambodian trading was enriching networks of merchants whose contacts extended from Bangkok to Phnom Penh to Ho Chi Minh City, while at the same time allowing resistance agents to enter the country. They were therefore viewed as capitalists, but also suspected as being agents of Beijing.³⁵

Nevertheless, the PRK had few alternatives but to ignore this façade. In the words of journalist John Pilger, “Without doubt the Vietnamese-supported administration was in no position to close the [Kampuchean-Thai] borders. It had the military strength,

³² Tom Fawthrop and Helen Jarvis, *Getting Away with Genocide?: Elusive Justice and the Khmer Rouge Trial* (London: Pluto Press, 2004), p. 64.

³³ Sophie Quinn-Judge, “Victory on the battlefield; isolation in Asia: Vietnam’s Cambodia decade, 1979-1989,” in Odd Arne Westad and Sophie Quinn-Judge (eds.), *The Third Indochina War: Conflict between China, Vietnam, and Cambodia, 1972-79* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 217.

³⁴ Report, Council of Ministers, Oct. 27, 1982, p. 1 (*Doc. 14-11*). See Evan Gottesman, *Cambodia after the Khmer Rouge*, p. 190.

³⁵ Sok Udom Deth, “The People’s Republic of Kampuchea,” p. 56.

but not the economic leverage to provide the badly needed items, or the food, which was also being shipped in from Thailand.”³⁶

Besides the existence of the black market, the overall PRK-Thailand relationship during the 1980s was not on good terms. After Thailand turned down the invitation to attend an Indochinese foreign ministers’ conference held in Vientiane (Laos) “to ease the tension of security problems,” a PRK’s August 1980 aid memoire denounced Thailand for: claiming neutrality but joining hands with China to support the Pol Pot-Ieng Sary resistance against the PRK; facilitating China logistically by allowing it to transfer weaponry to the Khmer Rouge; offering sanctuaries to the Cambodian “reactionaries forces” along the Kampuchean-Thai border; and using international aid to lure Cambodians into Thailand and using the refugees to fight against the PRK.³⁷ Though biased, the aid-memoire did hold a lot of truth regarding the general problems in PRK-Thailand relations.

5.5. Refugees and border politics

As discussed in the previous chapter, even before the fall of Democratic Kampuchea, there were already some refugees stranded along the Kampuchean-Thai border. According to UNHCR’s statistics in 1978, there were already some 34,000 Cambodians who had sought refuge in Thailand.³⁸ Approximately 125,000 ethnic

³⁶ John Pilger and Anthony Barnett. *Aftermath: The Struggle of Cambodia and Vietnam* (Manchester: Manchester Free Press, 1982), p. 77.

³⁷ Information Bureau of the PRK, “Memorandum of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kampuchea on the Tension along Kampuchean – Thai Border,” (Stockholm, 1980).

³⁸ Larry Clinton Thomson, *Refugees Workers in the Indochina Exodus, 1975–1982* (London: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2010), p. 171.

Cambodians and 194,000 ethnic Vietnamese and Chinese had also fled for Vietnam between 1975 and 1979.³⁹ Earlier stories of atrocities committed by the Khmer Rouge, however, were dismissed by some scholars and international organizations as mere exaggerations blown out of proportion. Gereth Porter, an academic based at Cornell University's Southeast Asian Studies Program at the time, for instance, regarded a *Time* magazine article as American government's propaganda of a "bloodbath myth" against Democratic Kampuchea.⁴⁰

Following Vietnam's attacks on Democratic Kampuchea, tens of thousands of refugees fled or were dragged along by the Khmer Rouge to the Thai border. The influx of the refugees along the border alarmed Thailand, but was also seen as a "human buffer" against Vietnamese troops. On the other hand, Thailand had other domestic concerns about the presence of Indochinese refugees. Thailand did not recognize them as refugees, but chose to call them "displaced persons" or "illegal immigrants."⁴¹ In addition to the suspicion that there could be spies and communist infiltrators among those refugees, the Thai government also feared that their presence (and the food and assistance they received) could cause jealousy among the provincial Thai locals along the border.⁴² As a result, Thailand pursued a selective screening process by allowing "anti-Vietnamese armed groups, including the KR, to enter Thailand and rest and regroup temporarily before reentering Cambodia," but

³⁹ Milton Osborne, "The Indochinese Refugees: Cause and Effects," *International Affairs*, Vol. 56, No. 1 (January 1980): pp. 37-53.

⁴⁰ Larry C. Thomson, *Refugees Workers in the Indochina Exodus*, pp. 130-131.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 172.

⁴² *Ibid.*

preventing “as much as possible, the entrance into Thailand of Cambodian non-combatants—people who sought food and safety.”⁴³

This selective strategy became obvious when in June 1979, more than 40,000 Cambodian refugees were told they were to be relocated to another site but were instead forced back across the border down the heavily-mined areas of Preah Vihear off the cliffs of Dangrek Mountain range. Those who refused to go down the cliffs were beaten or shot. The operation went on for several days. One survivor described the experience as follows:

There was no path to follow; we had to go through the bush. The way that we were to go down was only a cliff. Some people hid on top of the mountain and survived. Others were shot or pushed over the cliff. Most of the people began to climb down using vines as ropes. They tied their children to their back or strapped them across their chests. As the people climbed down, the soldiers threw big rocks over the cliff.

Closer to the bottom, there was a strong terrible smell. We began to see the bodies of those who had died there before us. The first people to reach the bottom walked out into the field and it was then that the first mines began to go off. Many people were killed here too.⁴⁴

Vietnamese soldiers who encountered the refugees on the other side also confirmed the horrors unfolding before their eyes. Out of the more than 40,000 refugees pushed back at Preah Vihear, at least 3,000 of them were believed dead; about 32,000 managed to travel on across the minefields to the Kampuchean side, while about 7,000 others were still trapped at the foot of the cliffs and their fate remained unknown.⁴⁵

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Cited in *ibid.*, p. 176.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

Initially seeing refugees as burdensome, a major rationale behind the Thai government's operation was to bring international attention to its "under-capacity" to deal with the influx of Indochinese refugees into Thailand. William Shawcross wrote: "At lunch with [Swedish Ambassador to Bangkok Jean Christophe] Oeberg on June 14, [Thai PM] Kriangsak said that the decision had been imposed upon him by the Supreme Command. Nevertheless, he was pleased at the international furore (*sic*) it had aroused."⁴⁶ It should be noted that the pushback was not done secretly and was intended to send a clear and loud message to the international community. In doing so, Larry Thomson suggested, "the Thais achieved their objective. They would not be left in the lurch with hundreds of thousands of Cambodians to protect and feed who would be a potential security risk and financial drain on their country."⁴⁷

⁴⁶ William Shawcross, *The Quality of Mercy: Cambodia, Holocaust and Modern Conscience* (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1985), p. 90.

⁴⁷ Larry C. Thomson, *Refugees Workers in the Indochina Exodus*, p. 178.

Eventually, as the international community responded more quickly to the plight of the Cambodians, Thailand became more willing to accept additional refugees. As part of the deal to halt the forced repatriation of Indochinese refugees, Western nations, led by the United States, pledged to resettle them. Consequently, “over 192,000 Indochinese refugees were resettled from Southeast Asian camps in 1979 and 260,000 more in 1980.”⁴⁸ Between October 1979 and January 1980, Thailand pursued an “open-door” policy for Cambodians, which allowed them to enter Thailand without restriction. By early 1980, however, as part of Thailand’s border ‘buffer zone’ strategy, “all new arrivals would be kept in border encampments, without access to third-country resettlement.”⁴⁹

By mid-1980, there were already more than 200,000 refugees sheltered in ten large camps along the Kampuchean-Thai border.⁵⁰ Among those 10 large camps, *Khao-I-Dang* (about 15 kilometers into Thailand) was the largest of them all, holding more than 130,000 refugees by July 1980.⁵¹ Jointly run by the Supreme Command of the Royal Thai Armed Forces and UNHCR, it held illegal entrants who would either be resettled in a third country or repatriated back to Cambodia.⁵² Relatively smaller camps were *Nong Chan* and *Nong Samet*, which were run by non-communist Khmer military and civilian committees, supervised by the Thai Supreme Command. Other

⁴⁸ Courtland Robinson, “Refugee Warriors at the Thai-Cambodian Border,” *Refugee Survey Quarterly* Vol. 19, No. 1 (2000): p. 24.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Michael Vickery, “Refugee Politics: The Khmer Camp System in Thailand,” in David A. Ablin and Marlowe Hood, eds., *The Cambodian Agony* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., New York, 1988), p. 295. Robinson estimated the number of “displaced persons” amassing the border in early 1980 was as high as 750,000. See Courtland Robinson, “Refugee Warriors,” p. 28.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 295-296.

smaller camps such as *Sakeo I* and *II* were opened and administered by the Khmer Rouge with a population of about 25,000.⁵³

While the availability of international aid from organizations such as UNHCR and the International Red Cross was a pull factor for refugees fleeing Cambodia, poverty and distrust (or even disgust) of the socialist PRK regime under Vietnam's control also caused many Cambodians to seek better opportunities in Thailand. Yet, the supposed frequent abuses by soldiers of all sides on refugees entering Thailand also discouraged many from fleeing Cambodia. The PRK government, though tacitly approved and preferred to see the flight of potential "bourgeois" dissidents, reacted strongly against the presence of the refugee camps which it viewed as intentionally set up by the Thai government along the border to serve Thailand's strategic interests. In its 1980 memorandum, the PRK government accused Thailand of using Khmer refugees on its soil "as a means of helping the Khmer reactionaries in their actions against the People's Republic of Kampuchea."⁵⁴ The allegation specifically spelled out Beijing and the U.S.'s involvement as well:

[Thailand] has refused to allow the Kampuchean refugees to settle in third world countries. Instead, they have concentrated them in "refugee" camps at the Thailand-Kampuchea border, these camps, supposedly supervised by the Thai army, are in fact controlled by the Pol Pot remnants and other Khmer reactionaries disguised as civilian refugees. It is no mere coincidence that the Thai authorities keep the "refugee" camps close to the border, that they demand the installation of security zones for the refugees, and urge the sending of U.N. observers to the border etc... their real objective is to ensure protection for the agents of Beijing and U.S imperialism to enable them to use Thai territory to oppose the Kampuchean Revolutionary People.⁵⁵

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Information Bureau of the PRK, "Memorandum of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kampuchea on the Tension along Kampuchean – Thai Border," (Stockholm, 1980), p. 3.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

The PRK's accusation was by and large valid. From Thailand's military strategic viewpoint, the refugee camps helped serve as buffer zones against Vietnam's possible attack on Thailand, however unlikely. As said earlier, the refugee camps were ultimately supervised (or at least approved) by the Supreme Command of the Thai Armed Forces. On a day-to-day basis, they were controlled by the Khmer resistance forces, communist or otherwise. Though there were originally numerous armed resistance groups, by 1982, they were grouped into three main factions: the communist Khmer Rouge, Sihanouk's royalist FUNCINPEC,⁵⁶ and Son Sann's republican Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF). It is not difficult to notice that these factions were former enemies in Cambodian politics, and continued to be so until mid-1982, when they were pressured by ASEAN and China to form a tactical alliance known as the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK) with Norodom Sihanouk as its titular head.

While the CGDK government was still the legal representative of Cambodia at the UN General Assembly, alliance on the ground was shaky at best, as clashes among the three factions still took place occasionally. John Pilger in particular held a very low opinion of the CGDK when he wrote:

In CIA terminology this [CGDK] was a 'master illusion'; for it was neither a coalition nor a government: nor was it democratic, nor was it in Kampuchea. It was fraud. The three 'equal partners' in the coalition were the ... (KPNLF), who were a few thousand adventurers and bandits led by Son Sann, a prime minister in the Lon Nol military regime.; the Sihanoukists, led by Prince Norodom Sihanouk, who had even fewer active followers; and the Khmer Rouge, whom Western

⁵⁶ FUNCINPEC is a French acronym for *Front Uni National pour un Cambodge Indépendant, Neutre, Pacifique, et Coopératif*, which translates to "National United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful, and Cooperative Cambodia."

and Chinese aid was then restoring as one of the strongest armies in Asia and for whom the coalition was a front.⁵⁷

That the CGDK alliance among the former Khmer adversary groups could come about in 1982 is a testimony to the changing necessity and harsh reality that, separately, none of the resistance forces would be able to survive politically in the long run, let alone put enough pressure on Vietnam to withdraw from Cambodia. After all, back in 1980, Prince Sihanouk had suggested: “As for bringing the Khmer Rouge and Sihanouk-supporting Nationalists together in a common United Front, that would be tantamount to putting a starving and bloodthirsty wolf in with a lamb.”⁵⁸ Similarly, he had also condemned the Khmer Rouge for reconciling with Thailand before he followed suit: “Particularly remarkable was the Khmer Rouge’s rapprochement with Thailand, the country earlier hosting the U.S. Air Force as it massacred the Khmer population and demolished Cambodia’s infrastructures.”⁵⁹ Even with his long-term supporter, Sihanouk’s relationship with China was cooling between 1979 and 1981. The prince regretted the loss of his children, grandchildren, and supporters by the hands of China’s protégés, the Khmer Rouge. China also was not happy with Sihanouk’s proposal during this time to negotiate with the Vietnamese PM Pham Van Dong for an independent Cambodia friendly to Vietnam. The proposal was flatly rejected by Vietnam (Prince Sihanouk’s first two letters to Pham Van Dong were unanswered, while the third one was returned unopened). The prince’s proposal for

⁵⁷ John Pilger, *Heroes* (Massachusetts: South End Press, 2001), p. 449. Paul Davies and Nic Dunlop, however, attribute the quip that CGDK was neither a coalition nor democratic to Ben Kiernan. See Paul Davies and Nic Dunlop, *War of the Mines: Cambodia, Landmines and the Impoverishment of a Nation* (London: Pluto Press, 1994), p. 8.

⁵⁸ Norodom Sihanouk, *War and Hope: The Case for Cambodia* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), p. 134.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

the UN to unseat Democratic Kampuchea also displeased China. Before the 1982 CGDK agreement, Prince Sihanouk had turned to his other friend, Kim Il Sung, for consolation.⁶⁰

In April 1979, the remnants of the Khmer Rouge forces mobilizing at the Thai border were estimated to number between 50,000 to 80,000.⁶¹ Unlike the ill-fated refugees who were pushed back at Preah Vihear, the Khmer Rouge forces stationed on Thai soil were allowed to remain there. Other Khmer Rouge escaping from Vietnamese attacks had retreated to Malai and Phnom Chhat close to the Thai border. China had from the outset considered the Khmer Rouge a major force to counter the Vietnamese hegemony in Indochina. As early as February 10, 1979, the Chinese ambassador Sun Hao and future ambassador Fu Xuezhong traveled to Malai and established the first Chinese “embassy” which was “literally a few grass-huts.”⁶² Due to the difficulties in having an embassy in Cambodia, Bangkok later became the point of diplomatic contacts between the Khmer Rouge and the Chinese. For the next decade, China provided approximately US\$1 billion to the Khmer Rouge through its embassy in Bangkok.⁶³ Sun Hao, former Chinese ambassador to Cambodia, was reassigned to the Bangkok embassy to coordinate Chinese aid to the Khmer Rouge.⁶⁴

Although Thailand was concerned about supporting the Khmer Rouge given the latter’s bad international image, the Thai military deemed it necessary to pursue this

⁶⁰ Norodom Sihanouk, “A Sad Deterioration of My Relations with the People’s Republic of China” in Julio A. Jeldres, *Shadow over Angkor, Volume One: Memoirs of His Majesty King Norodom Sihanouk of Cambodia* (Phnom Penh: Monument Books, 2005), pp. 218-221.

⁶¹ Michael Vickery, “Refugee Politics,” p. 303.

⁶² Sophie Richardson, “China, Cambodia, and the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence,” p. 178.

⁶³ Tom Fawthrop and Helen Jarvis, *Getting Away with Genocide?*, p. 56.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

policy to counter the “Vietnamese threat.” As the Thai expression goes, “use a thorn to pull a thorn.”⁶⁵ But as discussed earlier, Thailand also had domestic concerns for supporting the Khmer Rouge: “In exchange for Thailand's commitment to allow the use of its territory to supply the Khmer Rouge, China agreed to withdraw support from the Communist Party of Thailand and to provide the Thai military with favorable terms in arms sales.”⁶⁶ According to Ben Kiernan, “Chinese aid to the Bangkok regime totaled \$283 million from 1985 to 1989 alone, and the [Thai] military also gained preferential access to advanced weapons technology and oil.”⁶⁷ Moreover, the Thai army also benefitted economically from their contact with the Khmer Rouge. It was reported that “the local black market trade conducted between the Thai army and the Khmer Rouge was estimated at US\$500,000 per day by 1983, and by 1989 the Khmer Rouge was earning US\$2.4 million per month from territory it controlled with Thai assistance.”⁶⁸ As the border was placed under Thailand’s martial law throughout the 1980s, the Thai military also benefitted from “taxation” over traders or were directly involved in border transactions themselves.⁶⁹

Given the horrendous crimes committed during Democratic Kampuchea’s rule, the international community felt reluctant to provide overt support to the Khmer Rouge. To reform their image on the international stage, in December 1981, the Communist

⁶⁵ Courtland Robinson, “Refugee Warriors,” p. 26.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ben Kiernan (ed.), “Genocide and Democracy in Cambodia: The Khmer Rouge, the United Nations and the International Community,” *Southeast Asian Studies Monograph Series 41*, (New Haven: Yale University, 1993), p. 218. For more detailed discussion on Thailand-China’s arms deals, see Chulacheeb Chinwanno, “Rising China and Thailand’s Policy of Strategic Engagement” in Jun Tsunekawa (ed.), *The Rise of China: Responses from Southeast Asia and Japan*, NIDS Joint Research Series No. 4 (The National Institute for Defense Studies, Japan, 2009).

⁶⁸ Lee Jones, “ASEAN Intervention in Cambodia: From Cold War to Conditionality,” *Pacific Review*, Vol. 20, No. 4 (2007): p. 531.

⁶⁹ Lindsay French, “From Politics to Economics at the Thai-Cambodian Border: Plus Ça Change...,” *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* Vol. 15, No. 3 (Spring 2002): p. 448.

Party of Kampuchea (CPK) announced its self-dissolution, while Khieu Samphan “replaced” Pol Pot as prime minister. As such, the CPK became “the first and only Party in the history of international communism to terminate its own existence.”⁷⁰ Despite renunciation of communism, “Within the administrative system of the faction, besides the replacement of Pol Pot from the prime ministerial post, there are no other remarkable changes and all the influential members of the former Communist Party like Pol Pot, Ta Mok, Son Sen, Khieu Samphan, and Ieng Sary still held the same positions,” while “basic human rights and basic freedom for civilians were not respected.”⁷¹ Compared to refugee camps controlled by the non-communist factions, those under the Khmer Rouge were administered more strictly and little access from the outside world was permitted.⁷² Regardless of their tainted past and mere cosmetic reforms, the Khmer Rouge faction would continue to enjoy great support from China, ASEAN, and the U.S., because they were believed to be the strongest armed force to counter, or at least put pressure on, the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia.

5.6. The Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK)

As discussed in the previous chapter, there were already some non-communist resistance forces along the Cambodian -Thai border (most notable among which were those led by In Tam and Sek Sam Iet) when Democratic Kampuchea was in power

⁷⁰ Philip Short, *Pol Pot: Anatomy of A Nightmare* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, LLC, 2004), p. 416.

⁷¹ Theara Thun, “International Responses to the Khmer Rouge’s Diplomacy 1979-1991” (M.A. thesis, Chulalongkorn University, 2010), p. 32.

⁷² For more detailed discussion on the nature of Khmer Rouge control of the camps, see *ibid.*, pp. 31-34.

between 1975 and 1979. Their existence and activities, supported by the Thai army and/or border patrols, waxed and waned between 1975 and 1978 depending on the relationships between Democratic Kampuchea and the various governments in Thailand. In the wake of the Vietnamese invasion in December 1978, several non-communist forces along the border discussed the possibilities of creating the Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF), with Son Sann as its Chairman, and former Khmer Republic's FANK commander Dien Del as Commander-in-Chief. In addition to a deal in the making with the Khmer Rouge and China, Thailand also extended a hand to the non-communist forces. Soon after the fall of Democratic Kampuchea, Thai emissaries in France approached Son Sann and other exiled Cambodians to encourage them to form a tactical alliance with the Khmer Rouge. Approached by one of the Thai emissaries, Nguon Pythoureth (a senior member of KPNLF) replied that "If we did [accept the proposal], we would get weapons, but we told him, for us the Khmer Rouge were the number one enemy. Still, should they respect the people and refrain from attacking Cambodians, we were ready not to do anything against them (*sic*)."⁷³ In February 1979, General Dien Del travelled to the various border camps to convince the different resistance factions on the ground to unite. Consequently, the Khmer People's National Liberation Armed Forces (KPNLAF) was established on March 5, 1979. By mid-1979, the KPNLAF had a force of about 1,600 men. Eventually, the Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF) was officially launched on October 9, 1979, to coincide with the date of the proclamation of the Khmer Republic nine years earlier. Yet, as Justin Corfield noted:

⁷³ Jacques Bekaert, "Kampuchea: The Year of the Nationalists?," *Southeast Asian Affairs*, (Singapore: ISEAS, 1983): p. 167.

The KPNLF throughout its history has been, as its name implies, a 'Front' of various groups which have a common aim of ejecting the Vietnamese from Cambodia, prevent the return of the Khmer Rouge, and establish a democratic Government in Cambodia. Thus any groups, whether Republican or Royalist, were welcomed to join the Front. The KPNLF has certainly never been a wholly Republican movement as often alleged.⁷⁴

The KPNLF leadership were comprised mostly former members of the Democratic Party of the 1950s and surviving members of the Khmer Republic civilian and military apparatus. It is not surprising therefore that when approached by Son Sann in January 1979, Prince Sihanouk turned down the former's request to lead the KPNLF. Furthermore, it did not help that the official date of the Front's establishment (October 9), to Sihanouk's chagrin, was the date of the proclamation of the Khmer Republic whose leaders had deposed him earlier. Loyal supporters of Sihanouk, therefore, eventually helped establish FUNCINPEC in February 1981 with Sihanouk as president, Nhek Tiulung and In Tam as deputies. The Front's armed wing was known as the Sihanoukist National Army (generally known by its French acronym "ANS"). Some groups which had earlier joined KPNLAF but disagreed over strategy, as in the case of the Khleang Moeung group led by Tuon Chay, defected and joined ANS afterward. While some Khmer Sereikar joined the KPNLF, some remained independent of the Front as petty-warlords engaging in banditry along the border, and at times had skirmishes with the Thais, KPNLF, Khmer Rouge, ANS, or the Vietnamese.⁷⁵ Furthermore, as early as 1982, signs of an internal split among the KPNLF leaders already began to emerge, namely between Son Sann and General Sak Sutsakhan. By 1985, the split was irreparable. While some frustrated members chose

⁷⁴ Justin Corfield, "A History of the Cambodian Non-Communist Resistance 1975-1983," *Center of Southeast Asian Studies* (Melbourne: Monash University, 1991), p. 12.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

to return to their residences in the West, others joined FUNCINPEC, or had to choose sides within the KPNLF.⁷⁶

In spite of their differences, one major reason that held the official coalition together was their goal to resist the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia. The stated aims of the CGDK were “to mobilize all efforts in the common struggle to liberate Kampuchea from the Vietnamese aggressors [and] to bring about the implementation of the Declaration of the International Conference on Kampuchea and other relevant United Nations General Assembly Resolutions.”⁷⁷ Such goals were also in line with CGDK’s backers, namely ASEAN (especially Thailand), China, and the United States. As more refugees fled Cambodia, each group within the CGDK was able to recruit more men into their faction. Using a combination of financial incentives, ideological indoctrination, and/or conscription to recruit and maintain group cohesion, the resistance forces grew noticeably.⁷⁸ Among the three factions, the KPNLF placed the greatest emphasis on education to refugees under its control. Leaders of the KPNLF believed that education “would lead to the rebuilding of the economic infrastructure and the social structure of Cambodia [... and would] facilitate the return to power of the anti-communist, anti-monarchist, pro-republican political perspective now embodied by the KPNLF.”⁷⁹

⁷⁶ See Kong Thann, *The Khmer People’s National Liberation Front (KPNLF) and Road to Peace* (Edition Angkor, 2009), pp. 134-142; and Ieng Mouly, *On the Tortuous Path to Peace* (Phnom Penh: 2013). Available for download at: <http://www.iengmouly.net/topics/category/publication>.

⁷⁷ Cited in in Hanna Sophie Greve, “*Kampuchean Refugees: Between the Tiger and the Crocodile*” (Ph.D. diss., University of Bergen, 1987), p. 336.

⁷⁸ For a recent sociological study on group cohesion and disciplinary practices among the resistance forces, see Daniel Bultmann, “The Cambodian Field of Insurgency, 1979-1999” (PhD diss., Humboldt University of Berlin, 2013).

⁷⁹ Jeffrey R. Dufresne, “Rebuilding Cambodia: Education, Political Warfare, and the Khmer People’s National Liberation Front” (PhD diss., University of Saint Thomas, 1993), pp. iii-iv.

By 1984, the Khmer Rouge armed forces were “estimated at around 40,000 with a militia of another 10,000 to 15,000. In contrast, KPNLF armed forces numbered at most 12,000 while the Sihanoukist forces had perhaps 3,000-5,000 guerrillas.”⁸⁰ Likewise, financial aid from the U.S. also started flowing in. According to Courtland Robinson, “In 1982, the U.S. government had initiated a covert/aid program to the non-communist resistance (NCR) amounting to \$5 million per year, ostensibly for non-lethal aid only. This amount was increased to \$8 million in 1984 and \$12 million in 1987 and 1988.”⁸¹ Meanwhile, the United States also increased its military aid to Thailand: from US\$50 million in 1981 to US\$79.2 million in 1982.⁸² Furthermore, the Thai military managed to sell weapons to the Khmer Rouge and to non-communist Cambodians alike at great profit.⁸³

With the official establishment of the CGDK, international recognition of the resistance forces also increased. While only 71 countries voted to allow Democratic Kampuchea to retain its seat at the UN in 1979, the number rose to 90 in 1982. (See Table 1)

⁸⁰ Courtland Robinson, “Refugee Warriors,” p. 29.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, fn. 16; p. 30.

⁸² Rodney Tasker, “Uncle Sam, We Need You,” *Far Eastern Economic Review*, October 22, 1982, p. 27.

⁸³ Joshua Hallsey, “U.S. Foreign Policy and the Cambodian Problem, 1945-1993” (M.A. thesis, The University of Maine, 2007), p. 103.

Table 1: Recognition of Democratic Kampuchea at the UN General Assembly

Year	1979	1980	1981	1982
Yes	71	74	79	90
No	35	35	36	29
Abstain	34	32	30	26
Non-Participation	11	12	10	12

(Source: Theara Thun, “International Responses to the Khmer Rouge’s Diplomacy 1979-1991,” p. 15)

The “Kampuchean Crisis,” as it came to be known during the 1980s, became a deadlock almost from its inception. Not long after China attempted to “teach Vietnam a lesson,” in September 1979, the then-prime minister of Vietnam Pham Van Dong declared that the situation (i.e. Vietnam’s occupation in Cambodia) was “irreversible.”⁸⁴ Starting from 1979, the UN General Assembly increasingly voted in favor of a resolution initiated by ASEAN proposing an international conference to formulate a comprehensive political settlement in Kampuchea. The aim of the conference was to call for the total withdrawal of all foreign troops from Kampuchea and organize a free and fair election supervised by the UN. The resolution was rejected by Vietnam, the Soviet Union, and their allies, on the grounds that the Kampuchean problem was her internal affair in which the UN had no rights to interfere.⁸⁵ In March 1980, Indonesian President Suharto and Malaysian Premier Datuk Hussein Onn proposed a solution that came to be known as the “Kuantan

⁸⁴ Jacques Bekaert, *Cambodian Diary: Tales of a Divided Nation 1983–1986* (Bangkok: White Lotus Press, 1997), p. 10.

⁸⁵ Somphong Choomak, “Southeast Asian Security in the Light of the Kampuchean Crisis,” *Strategic and Defence Studies Centre*, Australian National University, September – December 1983, pp. 61-62.

Principle” to the Kampuchea problem: that Vietnam’s security interest (i.e. occupation) in Kampuchea should be tolerated, in exchange for Vietnam’s distance from the Soviet Union. The proposal was rejected by Thailand, Singapore, and Vietnam.⁸⁶ Until 1985, with the backing of the Soviet Union, Vietnam’s position had been rather inflexible. Eventually, however, Vietnam softened its stance and agreed to withdraw its troops from Kampuchea, to be followed by an election in Cambodia, on the condition that the Khmer Rouge factions were excluded from the whole process. Thailand and China especially objected to Vietnam’s proposal on the ground that if a national election was to be held, the Khmer Rouge had to be included as a party and that it was up to the Kampuchean people to decide through ballots whether they preferred the Khmer Rouge to return to power or not.⁸⁷ Consequently, the Kampuchean crisis reached a diplomatic stalemate.⁸⁸

5.7. The “K5 Plan”

By 1984, “bases housing some 230,000 Cambodian civilians and several thousand resistance fighters controlled by the Khmer Rouge, KPNLF and FUNCINPEC [...] stretched along the full length of the Thai–Cambodian border from the junction with Laos to the southernmost part of Thailand's Trat province.”⁸⁹ Given the ongoing diplomatic impasse, Vietnam attempted to strengthen its position on the battlefields.

⁸⁶ Vietnam’s Foreign Minister even considered the proposal that Vietnam should stay out of the Soviet Union’s orbit an insult, for it implied that Vietnam was not an independent and sovereign nation. See *ibid.*, pp. 70-72.

⁸⁷ Institute of Asian Studies, “Thailand’s Policy Towards the Vietnam-Kampuchea Conflict,” pp. 35-37.

⁸⁸ For the different proposals by all the Cambodian factions and foreign powers involved, see Department of Political Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Documents on the Kampuchean Problem 1979—1985” (Bangkok, Thailand).

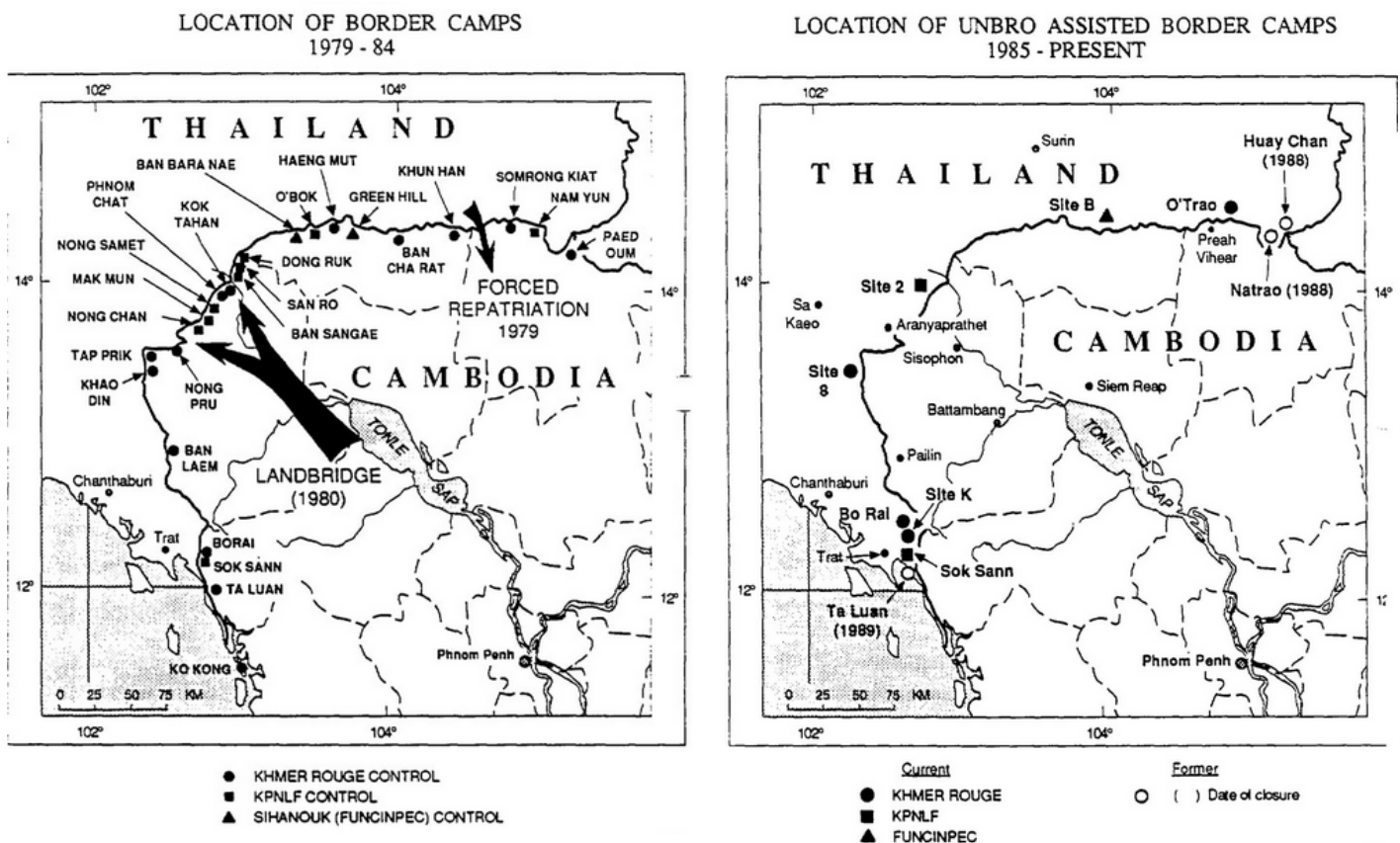
⁸⁹ Margaret Slocomb, “The K5 Gamble: National Defence and Nation Building under the People's Republic of Kampuchea,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (2001): p. 196.

The Vietnamese reasoned that the security of Indochina as a whole was possible only if all of its parts were secure. As the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN) had borne the brunt of the fighting against the resistance forces during the past five years, Vietnam wanted the PRK to share the burden of the conflict. To that end, in January 1984, a Communist Party of Vietnam politburo member Lê Đức Thọ chaired a seminar for the People's Revolutionary Party of Kampuchea Central Committee and the Council of Ministers of the PRK to carry out "the urgent task of consolidating the grass-root infrastructure of the PRK regime, the imperative need for a definitive solution to eliminate the Khmer resistance movements, and the all-round integration of Kampuchea into the Indochinese Socialist Bloc."⁹⁰ During the dry season of 1984-1985, some 30,000 Vietnamese troops, equipped with Soviet-type heavy artillery and tanks and supported by several thousand PRK troops led successful offensive attacks on the CGDK's bases and pushed them across the border into Thailand (see Figure 2).⁹¹

⁹⁰ Cited in *ibid.*, p. 197.

⁹¹ Peter Schier, "Kampuchea in 1985: Between Crocodiles and Tigers," *Southeast Asian Affairs 1986* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1986): p. 140.

Figure 2: Location of Border Camps 1979 - 1989



Source: United Nations Border Relief Operation (UNBRO)⁹²

The border offensive attacks were only part of the overall plan, however. Vietnam's long-term strategy included not only sweeping up the CGDK's bases, but also sealing off the entire Kampuchean-Thai border to shield Cambodia from infiltration by the resistance forces. The strategy was code-named the "K5 Plan" (or *phaenkar kor prahm* in Khmer). Canadian journalist Robert Karniol, who spent three weeks with the Cambodian resistance forces back in 1986, suggested that the K5 Plan referred to five phases of Vietnam's blueprint for ending the Cambodian conflict; the 5 phases involved: "the destruction of the border bases, sealing off the border with Thailand,

⁹² For more information about UNBRO, visit <http://www.websitesrcg.com/border/UNBRO.html>. The second map was for the years 1985-1989.

mopping up resistance units in sweep operations, consolidation of the PRK regime, and the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Cambodia by 1990.”⁹³ But former PRK premier Pen Sovann wrote in his autobiography that the term “K5” was the acronym of the Khmer terms: K*ae*n (mobilize), K*om*lang (forces/strength), K*ab* *chhkar prey* ([to] clear forest), K*ar-pear prom-daen* ([and] protect the border [of]), K*ampuchea*.⁹⁴ While Margaret Slocomb placed the date of the genesis of the K5 Plan in 1984, Pen Sovann alleged that the plan had been proposed to him by Le Duc Tho to be implemented as early as March 1981, to his rejection.⁹⁵

Whatever the exact date of origin or ultimate goals of the K5 Plan were, its consequences were disastrous. The K5 Plan proved to be an unpopular policy which created resentment among the people against the PRK regime and the Vietnamese. To achieve the plan, the KPRP Politburo discussed in late 1984 “the mobilization of several hundred thousand Cambodian civilians to “chop down forests, construct more roads, and lay down hundreds of kilometers of earthen walls, two-and-a-half-meter-deep spiked ditches, barbed wire, and minefields.”⁹⁶ Margaret Slocomb described the whole plan as follows:

The concept may have been similar, but the K5 barrage bore no resemblance to the Great Wall, nor was it even a ‘Bamboo Wall’, as it was often called. Jacques Bekaert witnessed part of it under construction near Pailin and described it as being about 2 km wide, with first a 500 metre strip of clear terrain, then a fence, a mine field, another fence and more clear terrain. Its construction varied in detail

⁹³ Ibid., p. 196.

⁹⁴ Pen Sovann and Neang Savun, *Pen Sovann: A Brief Biography and [His] National Cause for Cambodia* (Seattle: Khmer Vision Publishing Company, 2002), p. 197.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Evan Gottesman, *Cambodia after the Khmer Rouge*, p. 231.

and complexity, depending on the terrain and also on proximity to the main corridors used by the resistance forces.⁹⁷

While Margaret Slocomb estimated the total number of people conscripted for the K5 Plan between late 1984 and mid-1987 at 380,000,⁹⁸ Evan Gottesman proposed a figure of between 146,000 and 381,000 laborers.⁹⁹ It is not known exactly how many of the total conscripts lost their lives, though at least 25,000 could have died from malaria infection alone.¹⁰⁰ This was because many of the areas that the K5 Plan conscripts were assigned to clear the forest were generally malaria-infested. The rationale behind the forest clearance was to destroy the natural sanctuaries for resistance fighters' infiltration inside Cambodia. As a result, approximately 500 square kilometers of forest were cleared. According to Margaret Slocomb:

The destination of all this timber was not recorded in the official documents. It is widely believed, however, that Military Chief of Staff Soy Keo, the original leader of the Permanent K5 Commission, was removed from his post – and subsequently from the Party Central Committee at the Fifth Congress in 1985 – for grand corruption involving the illegal export of timber [presumably to Vietnam].¹⁰¹

Apart from malaria, many conscripts also became victims of landmines, as they were required to plant landmines or demine without proper equipment or technical training. The 1980s was a period of heavy usage of landmines along the Kampuchean-Thai border by all factions of the Cambodian conflict. While landmines reduced the

⁹⁷ Margaret Slocomb, "The K5 Gamble," p. 198. The reference to the "bamboo wall" was based on an earlier publication in French; see Esméralda Lucioli. *Le Mur de Bamboo: Le Cambodge après Pol Pot* (Paris: Régine Deforges, 1988).

⁹⁸ Margaret Slocomb. *The People's Republic of Kampuchea 1979–1989: The Revolution after Pol Pot*. (Chiang Mai: Silkworms Book, 2003), p. 236.

⁹⁹ Evan Gottesman, *Cambodia after the Khmer Rouge*, p. 231.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 236.

¹⁰¹ Margaret Slocomb, "Forestry Policy and Practices of the People's Republic of Kampuchea, 1979–1989," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 42, No. 5 (2002): p. 787.

incidences of skirmishes among the armed forces, they caused more casualties among civilians. It was under such circumstances that Eric Stover (then freelance writer and consultant to Human Rights Watch and Physicians for Human Rights) and Rae McGrath (former director of the Mine Advisory Group) wrote a report in 1992 and called it “The Coward’s War.”¹⁰² According to Halo Trust, “Over 64,000 landmine and ERW [Explosive Remnants of War] casualties have been recorded in Cambodia since 1979, and with over 25,000 amputees Cambodia has the highest ratio per capita in the world.”¹⁰³ It is not known exactly how many landmines/ERW still remain on Cambodian soil, but most estimates put the number between 4 and 6 million.¹⁰⁴ The presence of landmines and ERW in those areas continue to threaten people’s lives and impede their access to agricultural lands and productivity even at present.

5.8. Hun Sen and *perestroika*

In January 1985, the PRK’s Minister of Foreign Affairs and Deputy Prime Minister Hun Sen was promoted as prime minister of the People's Republic of Kampuchea. Once in power, Hun Sen made sweeping changes to the executive branch, changes that “continued throughout the next three years as revolutionaries and ideologues were swept from office and replaced by younger, technically qualified personnel.”¹⁰⁵ Kong Sam Ol, the minister for agriculture until he was replaced by Say Chhum in 1985, was “interpreted as indicating that Hun Sen ... was ‘establishing direct personal

¹⁰² Eric Stover and Rae McGrath, “Landmines in Cambodia: The Coward’s War,” *Asia Watch*, 1991.

¹⁰³ Halo Trust, “Cambodia,” <http://www.halotrust.org/where-we-work/cambodia>. Accessed September 25, 2013.

¹⁰⁴ Karen J. Coates, *Cambodia Now: Life in the Wake of War* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company Inc., 2005), p. 15.

¹⁰⁵ Margaret Slocomb, “Forestry Policy and Practices,” p. 785.

control over crucial sectors of the economy’.”¹⁰⁶ Having served as foreign minister, Hun Sen had the privileges of recruiting more educated cadres and non-communist intellectuals capable of running the ministry. By the time Hun Sen became prime minister, “several former Foreign Minister cadres became powerful ministers in an increasingly nonideological regime.”¹⁰⁷ His political patronage power was eventually extended beyond the foreign affairs ministry to the Council of Ministers.

Hun Sen’s rise to the top leadership also coincided with the changes taking place in the Soviet Union and Vietnam. By mid-1980s, the Soviet Union began to go through a transformation that eventually led to its own demise. Even before the new Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in 1985, the centrally planned Soviet economy had already been facing a major deficit, making its international commitments difficult to sustain. The Soviet aid to Vietnam during the 1980s, for instance, had an annual cost of 40 billion ruble (slightly over one billion U.S. dollars).¹⁰⁸ In addition, as the Ronald Reagan administration was putting more pressure through its arms race programs, Gorbachev’s reform-mindedness and aversion to conflict contributed even further to Soviet lessening commitments abroad.¹⁰⁹ Vietnam subsequently decided to adopt *doi moi* (“renovation”) in 1986 (mirroring the Soviet Union’s *perestroika*) due to decreasing Soviet aid, and shifted gradually toward a market economy.¹¹⁰ The PRK under Hun Sen’s leadership, which

¹⁰⁶ Far Eastern Economic Review (FEER), January 12, 1989. Cited in *ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ Evan Gottesman, *Cambodia after the Khmer Rouge*, p. 208.

¹⁰⁸ Vladislav M. Zubok, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), p. 299.

¹⁰⁹ See *ibid.*, pp. 278-321.

¹¹⁰ For a constructivist view on why Vietnam adopted *doi moi* beyond material interest factors, see Nguyen Nam Duong, “Vietnamese Foreign Policy since *Doi Moi*: The Dialectic of Power and Identity,” (PhD diss., University of New South Wales, 2010).

was never strongly ideological to begin with, also followed suit. As Margaret Slocomb pointed out:

The 1986 surrender to the free-market system was due to many factors. The state economy increasingly failed to meet demands for salaries and services to its cadres, soldiers, and civil servants nor could it supply the farmers with sufficient goods and services in repayment for the quotas it set for agricultural produce.”¹¹¹

Nevertheless, Vietnam continued to occupy Cambodia until late 1989 amid various attempts to negotiate with the CGDK and its supporters throughout the second half of the 1980s. But as Sophie Quinn-Judge noted, “The Russians continued to pressure Hanoi to agree to the inclusion of the Khmer Rouge in any peace settlement for Cambodia. Soviet aid to Vietnam fell by 63 per cent in 1990, and dried up altogether after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.”¹¹² In any case, PRK-Thailand relations were already undergoing some changes even before the final withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Cambodia at the end of the decade. This was possible due to the transformation of Thai domestic politics, as discussed below.

5.9. Changes in Thai domestic politics

In response to an interview question in 1985 as to what Thailand had gained from the Kampuchean conflict, Khien Theeravit replied:

[...] The worst effect is that the conflict has made the military become more important in politics and this has posed a problem to the development of democracy in Thailand. However, the dispute in Kampuchea has ruined the image of communism because the communists are fighting one another. The war has also affected the

¹¹¹ Margaret Slocomb, “Forestry Policy and Practices,” p. 786.

¹¹² Odd Arne Westad and Sophie Quinn-Judge (eds.), *The Third Indochina War*, p. 226.

position of the communist insurgents in Thailand as well as in ASEAN. China has suspended its aid to the communists in the region because it needs the assistance of Thailand and ASEAN in opposing Vietnam. In Thailand, the number of armed communists has decreased from an estimated 20,000 in 1978 to less than 2,000 in 1985.¹¹³

Although the Kampuchean crisis did have the side-effects of strengthening the Thai military (especially during the first half of the 1980s) and weakening the Thai communists, other local political developments were also taking place in Thailand. This had to do with the emerging presence of influential businessmen in Thai politics. In subsequent elections from 1979 onward, the number of provincial businessmen-MPs was on the increase. Based on Chris Baker and Pasuk Phongpaichit's calculations, "The proportion of Assembly seats occupied by businessmen rose from one-third in 1979 to two-thirds in 1988."¹¹⁴ Their political success stemmed from their ability to use a combination of "village-level networks, cash, official backing, pork-barrel offers to fund local projects, intimidation, and sometimes chicanery (ballot stuffing)," while local electorates chose them "perhaps for immediate rewards (vote-buying), perhaps because a strong, ambitious representative was more likely to bring benefits back from Bangkok to the locality."¹¹⁵

The "infiltration" of the provincial businessmen-MPs created a gradual division of power: while the soldiers and technocrats retained control over key ministries (e.g. defense and foreign affairs), the business-oriented parties competed to gain control over *less powerful* ones (e.g. education, transport, agriculture, and industry), which

¹¹³ Institute of Asian Studies, "Thailand's Policy Towards the Vietnam-Kampuchea Conflict," pp. 82-83.

¹¹⁴ Chris Baker and Pasuk Phongpaichit, *A History of Thailand*, p. 238.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 239.

allowed them to make business profits through procurement deals and/or favorable regulations.¹¹⁶ As Baker and Phongpaichit put it, “The parliament became a clearing house for business deals, especially construction contracts.”¹¹⁷ Starting from the mid-1980s, the relationship between the military and the businessmen became an uneasy one, especially as the latter were leading media campaigns to draw public attention to the size and secrecy of the military budget and its corrupt arms deals. By 1988, General Prem Tinsulanond was pressured to retire and allow an elected MP to become prime minister.¹¹⁸ In 1988, the general election winner from *Chat Thai* (Thai Nation) Party’s leader Chatichai Choonhavan, a former military officer-turned-successful businessman, succeeded Prem as Thailand’s premier.

Once in office, Chatichai’s Cabinet effectively reduced the power of the armed forces by cutting the military budget and demanding more transparency of its usage, as well as transferring the control over the key ministries of defense, interior, and finance from technocrats or generals to elected politicians instead. In terms of foreign policy, with the recommendation from *Ban Phitsanulok* (a think tank headed by his activist son Kraisak and staffed by young academics), his government advocated a policy that wished to turn Indochina “from battlefields into marketplaces.”¹¹⁹ In his keynote address presented at the conference on “International Security in Southeast Asia,” Chatichai cautiously expressed his optimism that Thailand would play a role in

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 240.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 241.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

bridging the Mekong River and the “two Southeast Asias” through economic cooperation, since “common prosperity is the best guarantee of peace.”¹²⁰

Thailand’s policy adjustments had consequences for both domestic and regional affairs. Domestically, Baker and Phongpaichit rightly observed that the policy “rejected the [Thai] military concern for security in favour of business’s desire for profit. It challenged the military’s ability to make foreign policy, and threatened the military’s control over border zones and their lucrative trades.”¹²¹ The policy was strongly opposed by the Thai Foreign Ministry headed by ACM Sitthi Savetsila (who had been an architect of Thai foreign policy throughout Prem’s rule between 1980 and 1988) but was very attractive to those in the Thai business sectors, who were eager to see Thailand become a major regional economic power and financial center.¹²² In 1991, however, Chatichai was deposed by a military coup.

Internationally, Chatichai’s policy appeared to have disappointed Washington and other ASEAN member states too. As recalled by Thai Senator Kraisak Choonhavan:

Washington reacted with alarm to [Chatichai’s] foreign policy initiatives to move outside of the US-China-Asean formula for a ‘comprehensive settlement’ and resorted to several economic threats in an attempt to bring Thailand back into line. At the same time the US ambassador in Bangkok insisted that the Khmer Rouge could not be excluded from any future Cambodian government.”¹²³

¹²⁰ Chatichai Choonhavan, “Thailand in a Changing Southeast Asia,” Keynote Address Presented on the Occasion of the Opening of the Sixth Regional Security Conference on “International Security in Southeast Asia” *IJSS-ISIS*, Bangkok (July 1989), p. 5.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 242.

¹²² Puanthong R. Pawakapan, “Impact of Thailand Diplomatic Commitment and Economic Investment to Cambodia after 1991: the role of Neighboring Country to Stabilize and Develop a Post-conflict Country,” report presented to Japan International Cooperation Agency, Bangkok Office, June 2006.

¹²³ Tom Fawthrop and Helen Jarvis, *Getting Away with Genocide?*, p. 87. According to the authors, “Among Thai politicians Senator Kraisak is almost unique in his frank admission that ‘Thailand shamelessly supported the Khmer Rouge’ and he apologised to Cambodia in a 2001 interview with the *Phnom Penh Post*. Thai support for the Khmer Rouge, pushed by both the Thai military and the foreign

Indeed, Chatichai's new policy helped reduce the tensions between Thailand and the Indochinese states, first with Laos, and later with Cambodia.¹²⁴ In a May 1988 report (three months before Chatichai became Thailand's prime minister), the PRK had complained about Thailand's land and air strikes along the border.¹²⁵ By January 1989, however, a Thai delegation led their first visit to the PRK. At the end of that same month, Hun Sen paid an unofficial visit to Bangkok and met with Chatichai Choonhavan and other senior Thai officials. On February 14, Cambodia established the Committee for Cambodian-Thai Cooperation with the aims of attracting Thai investments, and in May, a ceasefire agreement was reached between the two governments.¹²⁶ In seeking favorable relations with Thailand, Hun Sen tried to entice Thailand through attractive concession deals of gems, fish, and timber.¹²⁷ Although Thailand was still supporting the Khmer Rouge, some people within the PRK leadership were eager to sell timber to various Thai interests, with the hope of gaining Thailand's diplomatic support in return. In a Council of Ministers meeting in May 1989, Tea Banh (who had held senior positions in the PRK but essentially as defense minister since 1987 to the present)¹²⁸ tried to convince his colleagues:

We must cooperate and meet with Samphan's [a Thai investor] group because he has soldiers behind him. We've had four groups come to communicate with us. One was a government group that came only to

ministry, did enormous damage to Thai-Cambodian relations. Kraisak argued 'now is the time for Thailand to admit it was a wrong policy.' Ibid., p. 88.

¹²⁴ For a comprehensive study on Chatichai's foreign policy re-orientation toward Laos and Indochina, see David D. Oldfield, "The Restructuring of Thailand's Foreign Policy towards Laos, 1988—1991" (PhD diss., Northern Illinois University, 1998). This author of the research contends that Chatichai's desire for regional peace was the most important factor for Chatichai's adoption of his Indochina policy.

¹²⁵ Hun Sen, ["Report on the Defense Construction of Kampuchean-Thai Border for Dry Season 1987-88 and Strategic Plans for Rainy Season 1988"], Council of Ministers, 21/5/1988, Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

¹²⁶ Puy Kea, (*Cambodian Governments from 1945 to 2010*), 2nd edition (Phnom Penh: Reahu Publication, 2010), pp. 144-146.

¹²⁷ Evan Gottesman, *Cambodia after the Khmer Rouge*, p. 290.

¹²⁸ For Tea Banh's full biography, see Nem Sowath, *Revolution in a Distant Village: The Tea Banh Story* (Phnom Penh: Reahoo Publishing, 2009).

assess [the situation] and has not yet produced any results, perhaps because it is waiting for the Vietnamese army to withdraw. Another group has the [Thai] Ministry of the Interior behind it. We have sold that group a little timber to get it to create favorable conditions with regard to political [relations] with us. So we should give further consideration to this group. Another group was from the Thai parliament. [And] we have sold a small amount of timber to the [Thai] province of Trat.”¹²⁹

Lindsay French attributed Thailand’s changes in foreign policy at this point to three factors: Vietnam’s subsequent troop withdrawal from Cambodia, Cambodia’s reforms and the demise of the Thai Communist Party, and most importantly, Thailand’s market search for its booming manufactured-export-led economy of the 1980s as well as the exploitability of untapped natural resources (gems, timber, oil and water power) in the Indochinese region.¹³⁰ Cambodia was particularly an attractive choice because, in the words of Philippe Le Billon:

After 30 years, Cambodia still had forests but no industry, while Thailand had an industry but no more forests. In other words, war destroyed Cambodia and preserved its forests, while reciprocally, peace constructed Thailand and destroyed its forests. The transition of the late 1980s meant the incorporation of Cambodian forests into this destructive peace.¹³¹

Chaitichai’s new policy outlook was met with great enthusiasm by the PRK’s leadership because changes were under way within the PRK as well. As the state could no longer offer attractive financial compensation to state officials and civil servants, the shift to a free market economy was not only tolerated but quietly encouraged. In anticipation of national reintegration and a possible national election,

¹²⁹ Cited in Evan Gottesman, *Cambodia after the Khmer Rouge*, pp. 293-294.

¹³⁰ Lindsay French, “From Politics to Economics,” pp 448-449.

¹³¹ Philippe Le Billon, “Power Is Consuming the Forest: The Political Ecology of Conflict and Reconstruction in Cambodia” (PhD diss., University of Oxford, 1999), p. 193.

changes to gain the population's favor were deemed all the more imperative. As early as 1987, the PRK government had already expressed optimism in reaching a political settlement with Prince Sihanouk and in self-defense following the 6th phase of Vietnamese troop withdrawal from Cambodia.¹³² Large-scale social reforms were finally adopted by late 1989. Historian David Chandler summarized the changes as follows:

These [reforms] included revising the national anthem, changing the flag, amending the constitution to make Buddhism Cambodia's state religion, and abolishing the PRK statute that had limited monkhood to middle-aged Khmer. New laws also allowed farmers to pass title to land on to their children and householders to buy and sell real estate. The death penalty was abolished in response to criticism of Cambodia's human rights record. Although the PRPK remained in charge of Cambodia's political life, free markets and black markets flourished, traditional cultural activities revived, and collectivism was dead.¹³³

It should be emphasized here that without the social, economic, and political changes during the 1980s that brought about the rise of businessmen-MPs and Chatichai as prime minister of Thailand, as well as the reforms initiated by the PRK under Hun Sen's leadership, reconciliation of the Cambodia-Thailand relationship might not have taken place before 1991, if not later. By October 1991, with the initiatives and strong support by the international community (e.g. there were a series of negotiation meetings in Indonesia known as the *Jakarta Informal Meetings*), all the four Cambodian factions, along with 18 other nations (including Thailand), finally sat

¹³² Central Information Center, PRK, ["Documents on Important Questions and Answers on Public Encouragement during the 6th phase of Voluntary Vietnamese Soldiers 1987"], Phnom Penh, 1987; see also People's Police Newsletter, "The People's Security Forces of the People's Republic of Kampuchea and its Development over the Past 10 years," *SPK*, 1 January 1988.

¹³³ David P. Chandler. *A History of Cambodia*, 4th edition (Boulder: Westview Press, 2008), p. 235. See also Hun Sen, [*The Ten-Year Journey of Cambodia 1979-1989*] (Phnom Penh: Nop Bophan Printing House, date?), pp. 477-499.

down to sign the Agreements on a Comprehensive Political Settlement of the Cambodia Conflict in Paris.¹³⁴ The Paris Peace Agreement, as it is more commonly known, officially paved the way for the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) to be established the following year and to commence its peace-keeping mission and organize a national election in 1993. Despite its shortcomings, UNTAC helped Cambodia start a new episode of its history as well as a new chapter for Cambodian-Thai diplomatic relations as will be discussed in the next chapter.

5.10. Conclusion

Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia that toppled Democratic Kampuchea in January 1979 created a new juncture of Cambodia-Thailand relations. The presence of at least 150,000 Vietnamese troops in Cambodia hastened the normalization of relations between the Khmer Rouge and Thailand. Thailand's military-dominated government under Prem Tinsulanond between 1980 and 1988 adopted the policy of supporting the Khmer Rouge and the other Khmer resistance forces fighting against Vietnam's occupation of Cambodia, as well as allying with China and the U.S. in opposing the Vietnam-Soviet Union's "hegemonic expansion" in the region. Thailand's foreign policy during this period was driven by the military's perception of Vietnam's occupation of Cambodia as a threat to Thailand's border security, but also because alliance with China helped deprive the Communist Party of Thailand of China's aid. By the mid-1980s, the CPT dwindled in significance and eventually ceased to exist. In

¹³⁴ For a discussion on the negotiating process, see MacAlister Brown and Joseph J. Zasloff, *Cambodia Confounds the Peacemakers 1979–1998* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1998), pp. 43–88; and Jacques Bekaert, *Cambodian Diary: A Long Road to Peace 1987–1993* (Bangkok: White Lotus Press, 1998).

addition to its increased share of the national budget, the Thai military and border patrol police were also able to benefit from the prospering border trades with the various Khmer resistance factions and cross-border traders. With the rise of the Thai businessmen-turned-politicians and MPs, however, the military's power was finally eclipsed when Chatichai Choonhavan was elected prime minister in 1988. The Chatichai government's new foreign policy was then re-oriented to turn Indochina "from battlefields into marketplaces" (despite opposition from the military and bureaucrats in the foreign ministry), reflecting the changes of social, economic, and political forces in Thailand in the late 1980s. The Soviet's decline and its inability to sustain Vietnam's control over Cambodia prompted the PRK regime to adopt social and economic reforms as well. By the end of the Cold War, Cambodia and Thailand would begin a new chapter in their relationship that was overall marked by both gradual cooperation as well as conflicts, as will be seen in the next chapter.

This research has consistently argued that to understand Cambodia-Thailand diplomatic relations, we must look beyond such factors as international balances of power or nationalism, and instead adopt the "social conflict" analytical framework, which seeks to explain foreign policy as a result of different political groups competing for leverage over its ideology, interests, and strategies. In other words, while a political group may consider a foreign government an ally, other groups may view it differently – or even oppositely.

This chapter demonstrates clearly the need to view foreign policy not as a result of national decision making responding to an objective external threat (as in the realist

paradigm), but rather as a manifestation of a dominant political force pursuing a policy to advance its own ideology and strategic interests domestically. When Thailand's government was dominated by the military until 1988, Thailand's relations with the PRK under Vietnam's control were highly antagonistic. The two regimes shared neither political ideology nor mutual strategic interests. The Thai military government viewed Vietnam's occupation of Cambodia as an immediate threat to Thailand's security and actively supported the Cambodian resistant forces. As pointed out earlier, this perception of threat was not shared by everyone in Thailand. Rather, this policy was adopted by the Thai military government under Prem Tinsulanond not only as a security measure against a perceived external threat (i.e. a hegemonic Socialist Republic of Vietnam), but also to advance the military's interests domestically in terms of a secured share in the national budget allocation, alienation of the local Thai communists, foreign aid from the U.S. and China, as well as business opportunities along the border with the resistance forces. When the social and political changes in Thailand brought a business-oriented civilian government to power in 1988 and the PRK were gradually implementing their social reforms at about the same time, the two countries moved closer and became less confrontational. By 1991, diplomatic relations were moving toward normalization, until Chatichai Choonhavan was deposed from power in Thailand.

When writing about Cambodian-Thai relations, "embedded nationalism" and "historical animosity" have been commonly cited by many scholars as major factors affecting relations between the two nations. Yet, as I have argued in the two preceding chapters, nationalism is not a constant factor affecting Cambodian-Thailand

diplomatic relations. Instead, nationalism is only invoked by the political elites when domestic legitimacy is needed and if the foreign government does not share mutual ideologies or strategic interests. The discussion thus far in this chapter also supports this observation. Relations between Cambodia and Thailand during this period were not influenced by Khmer-Thai nationalist antagonism or historical animosity. In fact, Thailand supported the three main Cambodian resistance forces logistically and diplomatically against a common enemy: the PRK government under Vietnamese control. And even though the Thai government and the PRK government were hostile toward one another, it was not due to nationalism or historical animosity, but rather because both sides were divided ideologically and strategically in terms of geopolitical positions. Thailand did not support the Khmer Rouge because they were communist, but because they served as an effective buffer against the hegemonic advancement of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. Nationalism was an important factor in Cambodia-Thailand relations during the 1980s, not between Cambodia vis-à-vis Thailand, but between the Cambodian resistance factions and Vietnam, as the former viewed the latter as a traditional enemy harboring an ambition of annexing Cambodia.

Therefore, as also argued in the preceding chapters, international balances of power and a static concept of nationalism or past historical animosities cannot satisfactorily explain the frequent shifts of Cambodia-Thailand relations. It is true that the Third Indochina War between 1979 and 1991 shaped the foreign policies of both Thailand and Cambodia to some extent, but one cannot overlook the importance of factional power politics during this time, both among the Cambodian factions and the

circumstances of the domestic politics in Thailand. The shift of Thailand's foreign policy in 1988 was not simply a structural response to the waning of the Cold War tensions; it had to do more with the changing social, economic, and political realities within the country itself. Reforms within Cambodia under Hun Sen also made normalization of relations between the two countries easier to achieve. Likewise, the concept of nationalism as a major factor affecting Cambodia-Thailand relations as often claimed by some scholars also appeared to be a weak explanation, particularly in this period, when various Cambodian political factions were fighting against the Vietnamese and among themselves for political control, a reason that had nothing to do with "Khmer-Thai animosity" or "Khmer-Thai embedded nationalism." The next chapter, which focuses on the Cambodia-Thailand relations in the post-Cold War era, proves further that competing domestic power politics, rather than international balances of power or embedded nationalism, are lenses through which the two countries' diplomatic relations can be best understood.

Chapter 6: Relations in the Post-Cold War Era (1991-2014)

6.1. Introduction

By late 1989, the Cold War era was gradually coming to an end. In September that year, Vietnam officially withdrew its troops from Cambodia. In November, the Berlin Wall, which had symbolized the division between the capitalist western world and the communist eastern bloc, was also torn down. Between 1989 and 1991, many former communist countries abandoned socialism, embraced democratic systems with varying degrees of success, and were eventually integrated into the global political and economic communities now dominated by the liberal West. The Soviet Union finally collapsed in 1991, and was succeeded by the Russian Federation and the now independent republics of Central Asia and Eurasia. The apparent triumph of liberal democracy was so remarkable that it prompted American scholar Francis Fukuyama to dub it “the end of history,” suggesting that capitalist liberal democracy would be the prevailing political ideology in global politics in the future.¹ In contrast, American political scientist Samuel Huntington held a more pessimistic view when he argued that the future of world politics would be a manifestation of the “clash of civilizations,” in that different religions, cultures and ideals would be the sources of contention among different states and non-state actors in the post-Cold War era.² Empirically, development of global politics during the past twenty years presents a mixed record of accuracies and exaggeration expressed by both aforementioned views. The increasing number of states embracing liberal democratic systems and

¹ See Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Macmillan, Inc., 1992).

² See Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996).

regional groupings based on the principles of free trade agreements, as well as the ongoing conflicts between various states and non-state actors (e.g. the *jihadist* movement and the “war on terror”), are evidences which point to these rather contradicting trends.

Likewise, relations between Cambodia and Thailand in the post-Cold War period have also continued to fluctuate from being trade partners to being neighbors holding animosity against one another at times, and recently, on good terms again. Cambodia’s abandonment of socialism and reintegration into the regional and global markets and political communities in the early 1990s have greatly improved its relationship with Thailand (and other states) to a great extent. Yet, relations between the two countries have also been strained at times, as evident in the incidences of the “anti-Thai” riots in Phnom Penh in early 2003 and the occasional border clashes over the disputed territory adjacent to the Preah Vihear temple between late 2008 and 2011. While some scholars consider “embedded nationalism” and “historical animosity” as the main factors culminating the conflicts between Cambodia and Thailand, this chapter argues that, as in the Cold War period, domestic political power struggles are the underlying causes that generate either conflict or cooperation between the two nations. In doing so, the chapter discusses the complicated relations of cooperation between Cambodia and Thailand, the business deals between the Thai military and the outlawed Khmer Rouge guerilla movement, the rise of Thaksin in Thai politics and his alliance with Hun Sen’s government in Cambodia, the domestic politics of the anti-Thai riots in early 2003, and lastly, the recent developments of domestic politics

in Thailand that contributed to the fluctuation of the relationship between the two countries from 2008 to the present.

6.2. Election and the establishment of the Royal Government of Cambodia

In October 1991, all the Cambodian factions agreed to a ceasefire and peaceful settlement of disputes by signing the *Agreement on a Comprehensive Political Settlement of the Cambodian Conflict* (more commonly known as the Paris Peace Agreements).³ Eighteen foreign states (including Thailand) were also signatories to these agreements, which stipulated that a free and fair national election was to be supervised by the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) in mid-1993. Subsequently, the four factions in the Cambodian conflict registered their own political parties to contest the forthcoming election. Between 1992 and 1993, authority over Cambodia was to be vested in the 12-member Supreme Council of Cambodia (SNC), chaired by Prince Sihanouk, and was comprised of deputies from the different factions. For its part, UNTAC was responsible for peace keeping and for organizing the national election. The main contenders in this election included the reformed Cambodian People's Party (formerly the Kampuchean People's Revolutionary Party); FUNCINPEC now led by one of Sihanouk's sons – Prince Norodom Ranaridh; the Buddhist Liberal Democratic Party (BLDP) chaired by Son Sann from the KPNLF faction; the Khmer Rouge's National Union Party of Cambodia, as well as 16 other smaller parties.

³ Reaching the peace agreements, needless to say, was far from a smooth process. For discussion on the factional viewpoints and vested interests of major powers in the peace negotiations, see Pierre P. Lizée, *Peace, Power and Resistance in Cambodia* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press Ltd, 2000).

Before the election was held in May 1993, the Khmer Rouge faction had withdrawn from the ceasefire and reconciliation process. The Khmer Rouge firmly believed that UNTAC and the international community were biased against them, but more importantly, that there were still Vietnamese soldiers in disguise, and that they had no choice but to carry on fighting to save Cambodia from Vietnamese hegemonic control.

Despite the boycott and threats of violence from the Khmer Rouge, the majority of Cambodians still went to the polling booths and cast their ballots in a national multi-party election for the first time since the 1970s. According to UNTAC's official results, the royalist FUNCINPEC Party gained the largest vote share (45%), winning 58 out of the total 120 National Assembly seats. The runner-up Cambodian People's Party received 38% of the popular votes that translated into 51 parliamentary seats. However, the CPP cited electoral irregularities, refused to accept the result and demanded power-sharing with FUNCINPEC. After a few months of political impasse and a series of negotiations and threats, a political compromise was reached: FUNCINPEC's Norodom Ranaridh was to become First Prime Minister whereas CPP's Hun Sen was to be the Second Prime Minister. The power-sharing was also extended to the cabinet level, with co-ministers from FUNCINPEC and CPP in the defense and interior ministries, as well as alternating posts of minister and ministerial secretary of state for members of both parties. Prince Norodom Sihanouk was reinstated as the constitutional King of Cambodia, i.e. the monarch would reign but not rule. The BLDP was able to win ten seats but eventually dwindled into political insignificance as their members were later retired or decided to join other parties. In

July 1994, the Khmer Rouge (now staging guerilla attacks from their bases in western parts of Cambodia along the Thai border) were outlawed by the new coalition government, known formally as the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC).

6.3. Thailand's dual-track diplomacy with Cambodia (1993-1998)

Relations between the new Cambodian government and Thailand were rather complicated given the Thai military and business groups' continuing trade relations with the outlawed Khmer Rouge. Article 10 of the Paris Peace Agreements stipulated that "Upon entry into force of this Agreement, there shall be an immediate cessation of all outside military assistance to all Cambodian Parties."⁴ China, a main backer of the Khmer Rouge movement since the late 1960s, ceased support for the guerilla movement. Thailand, however, indirectly continued to finance the Khmer Rouge's survival through gemstone and timber business deals in the Khmer Rouge territories. As Lee Jones suggested: "Officially, Bangkok [i.e. the Thai civilian government then headed by the Democrat Party's Chuan Leekpai] pledged to respect UN sanctions, but this was simply ignored by the powerfully entrenched state-business networks along the border."⁵ For his part, Pol Pot contended in 1991 that "Our state does not have sufficient capital either to expand its strength or enlarge the army... The resources [in our liberated and semi-liberated zones] absolutely must be utilized as assets."⁶ Furthermore, Thailand's ban on logging in late 1989 had a direct consequence of

⁴ The Paris Peace Agreements can be viewed at: http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/file/resources/collections/peace_agreements/agree_comppol_10231991.pdf.

⁵ Lee Jones, *ASEAN, Sovereignty and Intervention in Southeast Asia* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 169.

⁶ Quoted in Global Witness, "The Logs of War: The Timber Trade and Armed Conflict," *Fafo Institute for Applied Social Science* (March 2002), p. 17.

fueling the increasing demand for timber import. Within three years, timber import into Thailand increased five-fold.⁷ As Philippe Le Billon noted:

These dealings further extended and consolidated relations between the Khmer Rouge movement (KR) and Thai military, businessmen and politicians through important financial interests. Despite political progress towards a resolution of the Cambodian conflict, fighting on the ground escalated, partly to increase territorial control and thus financial revenue.⁸

6.3.1. The Khmer Rouge factor

Following the outlawing of the Khmer Rouge in July 1994, First Prime Minister Prince Ranaridh appealed to all nations (though primarily aiming at Thailand) to bar Khmer Rouge members from their territory and “arrest those outlaws.”⁹ As early as November 1992, the UN Security Council had passed a resolution supporting the decision of Cambodia’s Supreme National Council to impose economic sanctions against the Khmer Rouge who had refused to commit to the Cambodian peace process.¹⁰ Successive Thai governments until 1996, however, constantly faced pressure from the Thai military and business interest groups to authorize them to engage in logging and the buying of gemstones from the Khmer Rouge. In 1992, for example, forty-eight Thai logging companies claimed that they had invested as much as US\$600 million to the Khmer Rouge for logging concession rights for the next 3-5

⁷ Philippe Le Billon, “The Political Ecology of Transition in Cambodia 1989—1999: War, Peace, and Forest Exploitation,” *Development and Change* Vol. 31 (2000): p. 789.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Nate Thayer, “Rebel Group Outlawed by Cambodia; Thais Implicated In Coup Attempt,” *The Washington Post* (July 8, 1994), <http://natethayer.typepad.com/blog/cambodian-thailand-relations/>. Accessed October 12, 2013.

¹⁰ Puangthong R. Pawakapan, “Impact of Thailand Diplomatic Commitment and Economic Investment to Cambodia after 1991: the role of Neighboring Country to Stabilize and Develop a Post-conflict Country,” report presented to Japan International Cooperation Agency, Bangkok Office, June 2006, p. 16.

years. In fact, Thailand's state enterprise Forestry Industry Organization was among those logging companies having business deals with the Khmer Rouge.

In its July 1995 report, *Global Witness* asserted that following international pressure, "Cambodia introduced a timber export ban which came into effect on the 1st of May 1995 - in other words, no timber should have been entering Thailand from Cambodia after this date."¹¹ Yet, the Thai Interior Minister continued to issue licenses for timber import into Thailand.¹² In effect, Thai military officers and timber businessmen continued to do trades with the Khmer Rouge, who were earning approximately US\$10-20 million per month, thereby prolonging the civil war in Cambodia. Such deals were also possible thanks to the prevalent corruption at all levels within the Royal Government of Cambodia.¹³ For instance, when the Thai government required loggers to obtain a certificate of origin, the Cambodian authorities charged the loggers a flat rate of US\$35 per cubic meter for the certificates, thereby enabling the Khmer Rouge to earn the hard currency with which to pursue their war effort.¹⁴

¹¹ According to Chandarith Neak, "From 1992 to 2003, there were not (*sic*) fewer than six bans. Immediately after each was imposed, it was lifted or suspended for various reasons. A log export ban was imposed in September 1992, but in October 1993 it was lifted to permit log exports until the end of 1993. In January 1994, the export of unfinished sawn timber was also banned, but the log export ban was suspended. In April 1994, a long export ban was reinstated, only to be suspended after June 1994. In January 1995, all logging was banned pending implementation of a new forest policy and the ban on log exports was reinstated in April 1995. However, export permits were granted to exporters in both 1995 and 1996. The log export ban was reinstated on 31 December 1996." See Chandarith Neak, "Cambodia State in Society: Making the Forest Sector (1993-2004): A Case Study of Logging in Kompong Thom Province," paper presented at the RCSD Conference *Critical Transitions in the Mekong Region*, p. 6.

¹² Global Witness, "Thai-Khmer Rouge Links, and the Illegal Trades in Cambodia's Timber: Evidence Collected January – May 1995" (July 1995), http://www.globalwitness.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/thai_khmer_rouge_links_and_the_illegal_trade_in_cambodian_timber.htm. Accessed October 18, 2013.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Global Witness, "The Logs of War," p. 18.

Thailand defended its imports from Cambodia as lawful. In response to *Global Witness*'s "Forests, Famine & War" report and the ensuing international media coverage on the issue, Surin Pitsuwan (the then Thai Deputy Foreign Minister) was quoted in the *Bangkok Post* as saying: "We respect the laws and regulations of the countries we do business with, whether logging, gems or fishery ... everything is by the rules of that country so it cannot be said we destroyed their environment."¹⁵ Though there was reduction of log export to Thailand by May 1995, it was due to the bad road conditions during the rainy season rather than because of the Cambodian government's export ban.¹⁶ In early 1996, Thai logging companies successfully lobbied the Thai Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister General Chavalit Yongchaiyuth to convince the Cambodian government to re-open the Cambodian-Thai border to timber import-export, lest the felled logs inside the Khmer Rouge territory "rot if they were not utilized."¹⁷ As a result, the Khmer Rouge managed to earn between US\$35-90 million for the approximately one million cubic meters of felled logs.¹⁸ It was only after Ieng Sary's faction of the Khmer Rouge defected to the Cambodian government in mid-1996 that the Cambodian civil war was slowly coming to an end.

In spite of Thailand's business relations with the outlawed Khmer Rouge, the new Cambodian coalition government had little choice but to accept this reality. In fact, *Global Witness* even alleged that the Cambodian two prime ministers and the Thai Interior Minister were all personally benefitting from a private Thai timber company's

¹⁵ Cited in Global Witness, "Thai-Khmer Rouge Links."

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Global Witness, "The Logs of War," p. 19.

¹⁸ Ibid.

illegal trade with the Khmer Rouge.¹⁹ Likewise, given the power struggle within the Cambodian government between FUNCINPEC and the CPP, other foreign companies (particularly Malaysian Samling Corporation Sdn Bhd) were also able to benefit from logging concessions awarded by the Cambodian prime ministers (without consultation with the National Assembly),²⁰ as both factions were competing to strengthen their power bases through income generated from the timber industry.²¹ According to *Global Witness*:

From the start, the two factions of this always uneasy coalition indulged in political rivalry rather than cooperation, and sought to build the strength of the armed forces loyal to each side. The funding for these activities came from timber. In one notable example Pheapimex-Fuchan, a Cambodian-Taiwanese logging company, reached a deal whereby it paid US\$ 5 to the personal security forces of each prime minister for every cubic metre of timber felled.²²

Similarly, Le Billon suggested that:

From the signature of the Peace Agreement in 1991 to the end of the first mandate of the newly elected government in 1998, Cambodia exported an estimated US\$ 2.5 billion worth of timber, roughly equivalent to its average annual GDP for that period. By the mid-1990s, the exploitation of forests represented about 43 per cent of Cambodian export earnings, more than any other country at that time (FAO, 1997). Such impressive figures might suggest a rapid transition and successful integration into international trade; but virtually none of this financial windfall went into the accounts of the formal economic process of reconstruction and development.²³

¹⁹ Global Witness, "Corruption, War and Forest Policy: the Unsustainable Exploitation of Cambodia's Forests, a Briefing Document" (London, February 1996).

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Personal interview with Lu Laysreng (June 2012), former Deputy Prime Minister of Cambodia from FUNCINPEC between 1993 and 1998.

²² Global Witness, "The Logs of War," p. 18.

²³ Philippe Le Billon, "The Political Ecology of Transition in Cambodia 1989—1999," p. 787.

The governments of Western countries appeared equally indifferent about the close link between the Thai military and the Khmer Rouge. Between 1994 and 1998, the Khmer Rouge abducted and killed at least ten foreign tourists.²⁴ In a rather unique case, Christopher Howes, a de-miner working for the British NGO Mines Advisory Group (MAG), was kidnapped and executed in March 1996 by the Khmer Rouge.

Tom Fawthrop and Helen Jarvis wrote that:

Khmer Rouge defector, Major Phuan Phy, recalled that Khmer Rouge Colonel Kong clearly explained their motive for killing the de-miner, addressing a meeting of Khmer Rouge in 1996: 'We spend a lot of money and effort to lay mines and they come along and remove our mines. The Britisher disrupted our operations and our security, so he is the enemy.'²⁵

Khem Nguon (deputy to Khmer Rouge commander Ta Mok), who arranged the execution of Howes, had been working closely with the Thai military for many years, although the latter denied ever providing any support to the Khmer Rouge. As pointed out by Fawthrop and Jarvis:

The Howes case was another illustration of how western governments turned a blind eye to Thai military's extensive links with their Khmer Rouge comrades throughout the UNTAC period and beyond. Indulgence of Thailand's violations of the 1991 Paris Peace Agreement, and failure to apply real pressure on the Thai military to sever their links with the Khmer Rouge, tragically prolonged the war in Cambodia. Up till 1990 western support for the Khmer Rouge is widely known. What is less well understood is the failure of the US, Britain and France in the post-UNTAC period of 1993–1998 to take any action against Bangkok to end the continuing Khmer Rouge insurgency, fuelled with Thai logistics and other support [...] It was far more convenient to divert responsibility for further action to the Cambodian authorities.²⁶

²⁴ Tom Fawthrop and Helen Jarvis, *Getting Away with Genocide?: Elusive Justice and the Khmer Rouge Trial* (London: Pluto Press, 2004), p. 115.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., 116.

Besides Thailand's trade with the Khmer Rouge, relations between the Thai and Cambodian governments were by and large cooperative, except for a minor incident related to a coup attempt on July 2, 1994. Allegedly masterminded by former CPP members (Ranariddh's half brother Norodom Chakrapong and former State of Cambodia defense minister Sin Song), the Cambodian authority arrested 14 Thais allegedly connected to a Cambodian general who confessed to involvement in the plot. Ranariddh also believed that a Thai police official and nine Thai specialists in radio communications were also aiding the plot. British Journalist Nate Thayer wrote at the time that:

According to Cambodian officials and diplomats, the heavy emphasis on Thai involvement appears partly intended to deflect attention from the role in the plot of senior officials of the coalition government. The sources said the coup attempt, which had been in the works for months, stemmed from a broad-based plot by hard-liners in the [Cambodian] People's Party to stifle growing dissent among their partners in Funcinpec.²⁷

At King Sihanouk's request, all nine Thais arrested were granted pardons and left for home. While Chakrapong was allowed to leave for France, Sin Song escaped to Thailand and was detained there, though the Thai government refused to extradite him to Cambodia, until he was released in May 1996.²⁸

²⁷ Nate Thayer, "Rebel Group Outlawed by Cambodia; Thais Implicated In Coup Attempt," *The Washington Post* (July 8, 1994), <http://natethayer.typepad.com/blog/cambodian-thailand-relations/>. Accessed October 12, 2013.

²⁸ Post Staff, "Sin Song Freed," *Phnom Penh Post* (May 3, 1996), <http://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/sin-song-freed>, Accessed October 14, 2013.

6.3.2. Cambodian-Thai economic relations (1992-2003)

Governmental relations between Thailand and Cambodia throughout the 1990s were largely positive, stemming from the increasing trade volume between the two countries and several investment projects and aid from Thailand to Cambodia. For Thailand, “apart from building a mutual trust and understanding between the two countries, the objective for several aid and technical assistance projects appeared to support the export strategies for Thai products.”²⁹ The value of overall trade between Thailand and Cambodia increased from 9,719 million *baht* in 1994 to 30,223 million *baht* in 2004. While Thailand exported manufactured products such as motorcycles and cement to Cambodia, the latter exported such items as processed wood and dried fish to the former. In addition to cross-border trades, Thailand was also the leader in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) to Cambodia in terms of number of projects in 1992.³⁰ However, from 1994 to 2003, Thailand’s FDI totaled US\$150.8 million, representing only 4.5 percent of the total FDI in Cambodia during the same period, falling far behind investment from Malaysia (46.2%), China (13.8%), Taiwan (10.7%), and Singapore (5.3%).³¹ By 2005, China was the predominant investor in Cambodia (79.3% = US\$237.8 million), followed by South Korea (5.2% = US\$15.7 million) and Thailand (4.9% = US\$14.8 million).³² Major Thai investments during this period concentrated in the following sectors: hotel/tourism, wood processing, communication, garment, food processing, construction, and agro-industry. Other smaller-scale investment projects were related to plastic production, media, mining,

²⁹ Puanthong R. Pawakapan, “Impact of Thailand Diplomatic Commitment,” p. i.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 31.

air traffic control, assembly plants, chemical products, petroleum, packaging, and the entertainment industry.³³ Thai political scientist Puangthong Pawakapan summarized several reports on the strengths and potentials for investment (as identified by Thai government agencies) in Cambodia as follows:

1. Cambodia was a transit link for Thai exports to reach the Vietnamese market.
2. The lower wages in Cambodia made the country a potential production base for high-labor intensive industry. Besides, Cambodia received the most-favored nation trading status from the United States and GSP [i.e. Generalized System of Preferences] from 28 countries. Thai investors should exploit such privileges by relocating their production base to Cambodia.
3. Cambodia was full of natural resources such as timber, gems, minerals, and maritime lives, which were in high demand in Thailand.
4. Cambodia had great potential for tourism development since the country houses the great wonder of the world, Angkor Wat as well as many other ancient sites.
5. The shared border between Thailand and Cambodia provide convenience for the transfer of goods between the two countries.
6. Thai currency, along with gold and the U.S. Dollar, were accepted for payment. It made trade transactions easier and thus allowed Thai businessmen a competitive edge over their trading rivals.

³³ Ibid., p. 33.

7. The design of Thai products was attractive. Also, the Cambodians were familiar with Thai products since they often saw advertisements via Thai television broadcasts across the border.
8. Thai products have dominated the Cambodian market via the high volume of border trade. Many big importers in Cambodia were business partners of the Thais. They helped distribute Thai merchandise throughout Cambodia.³⁴

To facilitate trade relations, Cambodia and Thailand signed several agreements throughout the 1990s: Promotion and Protection of Investment (March 1995); Trade, Economic and Technical Cooperation (June 1996); Establishment of the Subcommittee on Finance (June 1996); Cultural Agreement (June 1997); Border-Crossing (June 1997); MoU on Intellectual Property Cooperation (March 1997); Tourism Cooperation (March 1998); Air Service (February 2000); and MoU for Joint Trade Committee (May 2000).³⁵

However, political instability, poor physical and telecommunications infrastructure, the lack of skilled labor and professionals, as well as the lack of proper international banking and financial systems remained as major concerns to Thai investors in Cambodia during the 1990s. In addition,

[...] inadequate legal and judicial framework combined with poor enforcement of laws was another problem often mentioned in various research conducted [in Thailand] in the 1990s [...] The Thais believed a personal connection with medium or high-ranking officials was vital

³⁴ Ibid., p. 35.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 43.

if one wished to establish a business in Cambodia. The connection helped speed up legal process and official approval. It was however involved bribes and corruption, which resulted in the higher cost of investment (*sic*).³⁶

This last aspect remained a problem for Thai investors throughout the 2000s, and possibly continues at present.

In addition to FDI projects, Thailand also pursued soft power diplomacy by providing Cambodia with aid and technical assistance, as well as engaging in cultural cooperation that were considered to help smoothen economic relations and prevent future conflicts between the two countries (and with the former French Indochinese states in general). Starting in 1992, Thailand helped de-mine and restore parts of Cambodia's ruined infrastructure near Poipet-Sisophon, which was crucial to Thailand's expansion of trade and investment in the border area.³⁷ In 1994, Thailand built three Thai-Cambodian Friendship schools, a 100-bed hospital, and awarded training grants to Cambodian students in the fields of health care, education, and agriculture. In 1997, the number of scholarships granted to Cambodian students/officers rose to 118, 50 of which were in the field of human resource development, while the rest were granted to agricultural and police officers.³⁸ Between 1992 and 1999, Thailand's technical assistance to Cambodia was valued at some 267 million *baht* (approximately US\$9 million).³⁹ In 2000, the two governments also signed the Memorandum of Understanding on the Survey and Demarcation of

³⁶ Ibid., p. 37. See also University of Thai Chamber of Commerce, *Handbook for Investment in Cambodia* (in Thai). Report presented to Thailand Board of Investment, 2006.

³⁷ Puanthong R. Pawakapan, "Impact of Thailand Diplomatic Commitment," pp. 57-61.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 61.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 59.

Land Boundary (usually referred to informally as the “MoU 2000”; see **Appendix 1**), which established the Joint Border Commission (JBC) to carry out a joint survey and demarcation of land boundary between Cambodia and Thailand. But as Pou Sothirak pointed out: “[The JBC] encountered difficulties related to difficult terrain, complex survey operation problems and other serious factors related to mistrust between the two sides.”⁴⁰

6.4. The Cambodian political fallout (July 1997)

Relations between Cambodia and Thailand were slightly interrupted between mid-1997 and 1998, when Cambodia experienced intensifying internal conflict. Between 1993 and 1997, the FUNCINPEC-CPP coalition government appeared to be operating smoothly in façade, while real power rested heavily with the CPP. In spite of FUNCINPEC’s victory in the 1993 election, the party lacked human resources and power bases in the country that had been ruled by the CPP since 1979. As the 1998 national election was approaching, the power rivalry between the two parties became more salient and began to crack. Part of the equation for the power race was the various Khmer Rouge factions that had split from one another and presented an opportunity for the two governmental parties to vie for their respective alliances.

According to Steve Heder, “the government claimed that almost 6,000 [Khmer Rouge soldiers] had defected since 1994 ... among those who had defected since September 1993, 2,970 had been integrated into the RGC army, including three brigadier-

⁴⁰ Pou Sothirak, “The Border Conflict with Thailand: The Cambodian Approach and Its Possible Solution” in *Selected CICP Publications 2013* (Phnom Penh: Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace, 2013), p. 15.

generals, nine colonels, 30 lieutenant colonels, 39 majors and 120 captains.”⁴¹ By mid-1996, Division 415 Chairman Y Chhean (based in Pailin) and Division 450 Chairman Sok Pheap (based in Malai), both of whom were formerly associated with former DK foreign minister Ieng Sary, began negotiation with the Royal Government of Cambodia. At this point, Ieng Sary himself was encouraged to represent the breakaway factions from the Khmer Rouge’s “hardline” headquarters under Pol Pot’s command based in Anlong Veng in the north of Cambodia.

Ieng Sary’s breakaway from the Anlong Veng faction had both push and pull factors. As early as 1982, Khieu Samphan had already replaced him over foreign affairs. Ieng Sary also fell out with the Khmer Rouge military leader Son Sen over military tactics.⁴² He was further marginalized throughout the 1980s, and by mid-1990s, he was undergoing medical treatment in Bangkok and was no longer involved in the Khmer Rouge central command’s activities.⁴³ When Hun Sen and Ranaridh were extending their hands to allure Ieng Sary’s troops into their respective armed factions, Ieng Sary took up the offer, especially when he was presented with a royal amnesty signed by King Sihanouk.

Other factions of the Khmer Rouge (such as those in Veal Veng, Pursat) who had defected even earlier did so for various reasons. Many Khmer Rouge soldiers were weary of fighting a war they had no chance of winning and had little benefit from. As one former Khmer Rouge fighter put it, “The standard of living of most KR soldiers

⁴¹ Steve Heder, “A Review of the Negotiations Leading to the Establishment of the Personal Jurisdiction of the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia” (London/Paris, August 2011), p. 9.

⁴² Ibid., pp. 9-10.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 10.

was very low, despite all the money from selling timber to Thailand because most of the money was sent to the KR central command [KR elites in Anlong Veng].”⁴⁴ In addition, the Win-Win policy initiated by the CPP was an attractive option to the Khmer Rouge fighters. Martin J. O’Brien-Kelly who studied the defections among the Veal Veng faction summarized it well:

The Win-Win policy offered what the KR communities needed: political power sharing, private property/land rights, and guarantees that reintegrating communities would receive development and security. Reintegration would be achieved by letting the free market transform previously marginalized areas. A cash economy was nascent in former-KR strongholds, and development would be based on the use and extraction of natural resources and on subsistence based agriculture.⁴⁵

While Khmer Rouge defections in late 1996 and 1997 helped bring the RGC-Khmer Rouge conflict closer to an end, it also imploded the FUNCINPEC-CPP coalition. The two parties accused each other of attempting to use the Khmer Rouge breakaway forces to bolster their own factional armies. In July 1997, clashes between the two factions broke out. While many observers considered the fighting a coup by the CPP, the CPP itself and other observers (notable among whom were the then Australian ambassador Tony Kevin and independent researcher Michael Vickery) claimed that the fighting was CPP’s pre-emptive strike for FUNCINPEC’s planned attack, as

⁴⁴ Martin J. O’Brien-Kelly, “The Role of Natural Resources in the Khmer Rouge – Royal Government of Cambodia Peace Negotiations and Reintegration Process” (M.A. thesis, Chulalongkorn University, 2006), p. 33.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 55. For further discussion on the strategies of the Win-Win Policy, see Nem Sowath, *Civil War Termination and the Source of Total Peace: Win-Win Policy of Samdech Techo Hun Sen in International Context* (Phnom Penh: Reahoo, 2012).

Ranaridh was allegedly seeking alliance with the Anlong Veng Khmer Rouge faction and had imported illegal weapons.⁴⁶ Michael Vickery even suggested at the time that:

Not only would the Ranariddh-KR [i.e. Khmer Rouge] coalition not have brought peace to Cambodia, it could have embroiled Viet Nam as well, for reports of KR radio broadcasts indicate that nothing of their traditional policy has changed. Hatred of Viet Nam as the main enemy continues; and several weeks ago Ranariddh boasted of using defecting KR in his own anti-Vietnamese plans.⁴⁷

After Ranaridh fled Cambodia and his forces defeated, Hun Sen emerged victorious after the clashes and earned a new title in the international press as the “strong man of Cambodia.” The regional impact of the fighting, however, was the signal to the international community that Cambodia was politically unstable. After a failed self-styled ASEAN-Troika’s (comprising foreign ministers of Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines) visit to Cambodia was rejected by Hun Sen, Cambodia’s membership application to ASEAN was put on hold.⁴⁸ Cambodia’s UN membership was later suspended and foreign aid was also withheld.⁴⁹ Noteworthy was also the fact that, following the July 1997 fighting, China and the CPP put aside their past animosity and have since strengthened their relationship to the present. Not only did China not join the other donor countries chorus in condemning the CPP over the “coup,” but it also immediately provided a US\$10 million loan and US\$2.8 million in military aid to

⁴⁶ See Michael Vickery, *Cambodia: A Political Survey* (Phnom Penh: Editions Funan, 2007), pp. 162-166.

⁴⁷ Michael Vickery, “Kicking the Vietnam Syndrome in Cambodia: Collected Writings 1975 – 2010” (Chiang Mai, 2010), p. 504. Retrieved November 24, 2013 from <http://michaelvickery.org/>.

⁴⁸ See Kao Kim Hourn, *Cambodia’s Foreign Policy and ASEAN: From Nonalignment to Engagement* (Phnom Penh, CICP, 2002), pp. 92-105.

⁴⁹ Lee Jones, *ASEAN, Sovereignty and Intervention in Southeast Asia*, p. 176. The suspension of Cambodia’s UN membership followed a diplomatic problem when the post-July 1997 Phnom Penh-based government and the newly-set up Union of Cambodian Democrats (comprising FUNCINPEC and the new opposition Sam Rainsy Party) in Bangkok both sent their rival delegations to represent Cambodia at the opening of the UN General Assembly in October that year. See Caroline Hughes, *The Political Economy of Cambodia’s Transition, 1991–2001* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), p. 107.

the now CPP-led government. In return, the CPP cut off Cambodia's ties with Taiwan.⁵⁰ Cambodia has since consistently pursued the One-China policy.

Given its emerging interests in Cambodia, Thailand, among other regional and major powers, attempted to rally the Cambodian factions to reach a compromise. As a former Thai ambassador to the United Nations Asda Jayanama later recalled, somewhat condescendingly:

In the case of Cambodia, we were very much involved. We actually interfered... we set up the state, the rules and the conditions, and we built Cambodia... we were quite strict, stern, on making our demands when there was a coup [in 1997]... we felt that Cambodia was 'our baby', you know – we took a lot of trouble to set up the international conference on Cambodia, we fought many years against [the] Vietnamese, 10, 11 or 12 years of resolutions. So it was our special interest.⁵¹

Particularly active was Thailand's then deputy foreign minister Sukhumbhand Pabibatra (currently, the Governor of Bangkok), who shuttled repeatedly between the two Cambodian parties to convince them to accept the plan proposed by Japan to break the political deadlock by having Ranariddh tried but subsequently receiving an automatic pardon from King Sihanouk.⁵²

After the July 1998 election, Hun Sen became the sole prime minister of Cambodia, while Ranariddh now served as the Chairman of the National Assembly. As the CPP did not win a two-third majority in the parliament, it was required to form a coalition government with FUNCINPEC. This time, the cabinet was clearly dominated by the

⁵⁰ John D. Ciorciari, "China and Cambodia: Patron and Client?," *IPC Working Paper Series No. 121*, Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy, University of Michigan (June 2013), pp., 7-8.

⁵¹ Quoted in Lee Jones, *ASEAN, Sovereignty and Intervention in Southeast Asia*, p. 160.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 184.

CPP. Relations with Thailand and the rest of the international community resumed.

By the end of April 1999, Cambodia became the tenth member of ASEAN.

6.5. The rise of Thaksin and Thai foreign policy toward Cambodia

The political instability in Cambodia in 1997 coincided with the Asian Financial Crisis that had erupted in Bangkok. While Hun Sen emerged as the dominant political figure in Cambodia after the July “coup,” one of the outcomes of the Asian Financial Crisis was the dramatic rise of Thaksin Shinawatra, a Thai telecommunications tycoon, who has since transformed much of Thai politics and Cambodia-Thailand relations to the present.

Thaksin graduated from Thailand’s Police Academy and later received his doctorate in criminal justice from Sam Houston University in Texas in 1979. Upon returning home, he started serving at a police station in Bangkok. By the time he resigned in 1987, he earned the rank of lieutenant colonel.⁵³ During the 1980s, thanks to his connections, he became very successful with his business contracts with the government (such as leasing computers and providing telecommunications services to government agencies). By the time he joined politics in 1994, he became one of the most successful businessmen in Thailand.⁵⁴ Thaksin joined the Palang Dharma (“Power of Justice”) Party in 1994 and became the foreign minister in the coalition government with the Democrat Party at the time, though only briefly from November

⁵³ Pavin Chachavalpongpun, *Reinventing Thailand: Thaksin and His Foreign Policy* (Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2010), p. 7.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

1994 to February 1995. He later served as deputy prime minister under Banharn Silpa-archa (1995-96) and Chavalit Yongchaiyuth (1996-1997).⁵⁵

Thaksin's final rise to power happened in the context of Thailand's weakened economy after the Asian Financial Crisis. Between 1997 and 2001, the Democrat Party under Chuan Leekpai complied with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) measures, which Thaksin derided as a loss of Thailand's economic sovereignty and independence. According to the Thai diplomat-turned-scholar Pavin Chachavalpongpun, Thaksin managed to win the national election in 2001 through a heavily populist economic platform (now also known as "Thaksinomics"):

[...] the emphasis on reversing several key IMF policies adopted by the Chuan government, while aiming at producing rapid economic growth, enlarging the scale of local manufacturing known as OTOP (One *Tombon*, One Product) projects, improving rural living conditions through new subsidized loans, creating a debt moratorium for farmers and offering cheap healthcare service through the so-called "Bt30 Curing All" scheme.⁵⁶

Until Thaksin was elected in 2001, Thailand had been ruled largely during the previous decades by what the British Scholar Duncan McCargo termed the "networked monarchy." He described the main features of Thailand's network monarchy from 1980 to 2001 as follows:

the monarch was the ultimate arbiter of political decisions in times of crisis; the monarchy was the primary source of national legitimacy; the King acted as a didactic commentator on national issues, helping to set the national agenda, especially through his annual birthday speeches; the monarch intervened actively in political developments, largely by working through proxies such as privy councillors and trusted military figures; and the lead proxy, former army commander and prime minister Prem Tinsulanond, helped determine the nature of coalition governments, and monitored the process of military and other

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 8

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 9.

promotions. At heart, network governance of this kind relied on placing the right people (mainly, the right men) in the right jobs. Allocation of key posts was the primary role of the lead proxy, Prem.⁵⁷

Even when civilian governments were in power, they were not completely independent and did not constitute a significant threat to the networked monarchy. If they did, a military coup ensued. This was evident in the case of the ousting of independent-minded Chatichai Choonhavan in 1991, or when subsequent Thai civilian governments (especially under Chuan Leekpai from 1992 to 1995) had to allow the Thai business and military establishments to maintain gemstone and timber trades with the Khmer Rouge during the 1990s. Likewise, the role of the Thai rural population in politics had hitherto been largely marginalized.

When Thaksin won the election in 2001, he not only presented himself as a capable technocrat who would lead Thailand in the globalized economy, but he also pursued populist policies that gained favorable support from the rural areas while antagonizing the more critical Bangkok elites and middle class. His rural popularity and independent style of government that moved away from subordination to the established “networked monarchy” apparatus began to constitute a threat to the power base of the latter. It is also not difficult to presume that his rising popularity among the Thai populace in rural areas must have alarmed the Thai monarch.

In terms of foreign policy outlook, Thaksin’s approach and his relations with Cambodia proved even more clearly the validity and usefulness of viewing foreign

⁵⁷ Duncan McCargo, “Network Monarchy and Legitimacy Crises in Thailand,” *The Pacific Review*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (2005): p. 501.

policy formulation through the lens of “social conflict” analysis, as argued throughout this dissertation. Pavin Chachavalpongpun rejected the conventional notion that Thailand’s foreign policy was to “bend with the prevailing wind.” He argued convincingly that Thailand’s foreign policy under the Thaksin administration was “an extension of domestic policy, a tool for the leader to garner power, be it in the domestic or international realm, and not necessarily serving national interests.”⁵⁸ Thaksin’s approach in foreign relations (or “Thaksiplomacy,” as dubbed by his political opponents), continued the legacy of Chatichai Choonhavan’s commercial-driven policy espoused in 1988.⁵⁹ It is true that successive Thai governments during the 1990s also pursued similar regional policies, but as Pavin remarked, “Thaksin pushed the envelope further by binding tightly the country’s foreign policy with his domestic populist programmes.”⁶⁰ Thaksin’s economic interests in Myanmar and his willingness to speak on behalf of Myanmar’s sluggish democratic process, was a testament to his new vision of foreign policy.⁶¹ With the “Ayeyawady– Chao Phraya – Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy” (ACMECS) initiated by his administration in November 2003 in Bagan (Myanmar), Thaksin sought to enhance the interests of his business empires through investments in infrastructure

⁵⁸ Pavin Chachavalpongpun, *Reinventing Thailand*, p. 4.

⁵⁹ For further discussion on Thailand’s foreign policy based aspirations to become a regional power (particularly under Chatichai and Thaksin), see Pongphisoot Busarat, “Embracing Proaction: The Role of Self-Perception in Thailand’s Post-Cold War Foreign Policy” (PhD diss., Australian National University, 2009).

⁶⁰ Pavin Chachavalpongpun, *Reinventing Thailand*, p. 11.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 3. According to Chum Sonya, “Former Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra was aimed to use the ACMECS to expand his own business empire. Thaksin urged Myanmar to accept Thailand’s loan package to improve Myanmar’s communication system. He authorized the Thai government to offer a soft-loans package that was worth 600 million baths to Burma’s Ministry of Communications, Post and Telegraph Union (MCPTU) under the economic framework in early 2004. Chongkittavorn points out that Myanmar had given concessions on satellite systems in lieu of Thaksin’s business enterprises in return. For example, Shin Satellite Co. was able to secure the contract for the satellite system in Myanmar.” Chum Sonya, *Regional Integration and Political Rivalries among the East Asian States and Their Impacts on Mekong Sub-Regional Development* (CICP E-BOOK No. 3) (Phnom Penh: CICP, 2010), p. 30.

developments in Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar (CLM). As part of the ACMECS, Special Economic Zones along the borders of these countries were also established with the intent of deterring illegal foreign workers from entering Thailand and reducing illegal drug flow and crime rates in Thailand, as well as increasing Thailand's manufacturing industries' competitiveness by making use of cheap labor and resources from CLM.⁶²

At the same time, Thaksin's regional diplomacy also reflected the domestic competition for control over decision-making processes between the prime minister and the conservative faction within the foreign affairs ministry, which he referred to as a "dinosaur" organization out of touch with the new global reality.⁶³

Cambodia's relations with Thailand (under Hun Sen and Thaksin, respectively) during the early 2000s were very cooperative. Along with Thai investments and exports to Cambodia, Thai movies and series dominated TV screens in Cambodia. Even before coming to power, Thaksin had already made a personal investment in the telecommunications industry in Cambodia through his company known as *CAMSHIN* (i.e. "Cambodia Shinawatra"), which saw the revenues from sales and services rise from 3.7 billion *baht* in 2002 to 4.3 billion *baht* in 2003.⁶⁴ Once in power, Thaksin would pay official visits to Cambodia and private visits to Hun Sen at least eight times to gain access to and strengthen ties with the Cambodian leadership.⁶⁵ Thaksin's attempts to have good relations with Cambodia, especially with "strong man" Hun Sen, serves several purposes. As Pavin Chachavalpungpun rightly pointed out:

⁶² Chum Sonya, *Regional Integration*, pp. 28-30.

⁶³ Pavin Chachavalpungpun, *Reinventing Thailand*, p. 10.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 170.

It served as the latest avenue of cooperation where both countries could benefit directly from various joint economic projects. It supposedly helped bury their contentious history and old images of enemy, and diffuse lingering suspicions between them. More importantly, it served to neutralize the ongoing political troubles, such as territorial disputes and security issues along their common borders. But Thaksin also realized that his approach – pure business and no politics – would be successful only if he involved the Cambodian leaders who controlled most of the big businesses in Phnom Penh. Lucrative business owned by provincial godfathers and mafias along the Thai-Cambodian border were found to have the blessing of politicians. These businesses were an essential part of Cambodian politics.⁶⁶

In addition to these personal relations, “sister cities programmes” along the border were also encouraged to promote regular contacts among the peoples of both countries. In June 2001, Cambodia and Thailand also signed the Memorandum of Understanding regarding the Area of their Overlapping Maritime Claims to the Continental Shelf (see **Appendix 2 & 3**), and “vowed to make use of the Joint Commission (JC) for Bilateral Cooperation, first established in 1995, to promote all areas of cooperation including the issues of border demarcation and maritime delimitation through the Joint Border Commission (JBC).”⁶⁷

6.6. The politics of the 2003 anti-Thai riots

Despite such close personal ties between Thaksin and Hun Sen, Thailand’s close relations with Cambodia came to a halt in early 2003. The problem stemmed from the appearance of an article on January 18, 2003 on *Rasmei Kampuchea* Newspaper, which alleged that a popular Thai actress by the name of Suvanan Kongying (known

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 172.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

as *Pkay Prek* or “Morning Star” among Cambodians) had said in an interview in Thailand that “she would only ever accept an invitation to perform in Cambodia if the famous Angkor Wat [temple] was returned to Thailand and she looked down [on Cambodians] by saying that if she was reincarnated, she would rather be a dog than be a Khmer national.”⁶⁸ The alleged interview could not be verified, even if many Cambodians believed that it was true. The immediate impact of the story was infuriation among Cambodians, who had always held a view that Thai people always looked down upon them. The fury was further exacerbated when Hun Sen made a televised comment that the Thai star was “worth less than a few clumps of grass at Angkor Wat.” The problem got out of hand on January 29, when riots led to the burning of the Thai embassy and destruction of several other well-known Thai business establishments, such as the Elephant Cement factory, Red Bull M150 factory, Royal Phnom Penh Hotel and Julia Hotel, as well as Thaksin’s telecom companies, among others. Thailand, in response, condemned the riots and decided to close the border with Cambodia.⁶⁹

Some scholars have discussed the influences of historical narratives and nationalist discourses that led to the antagonistic feelings between the Khmers and the Thais.

Thai historian Charnvit Kasetsiri, for example, wrote:

The violence which culminated in the burning of the Royal Thai Embassy in Phnom Penh on January 29, 2003, was both shocking and unexpected. [...] It also warrants study of the history of Thai-Cambodian relations to understand the deep-seated causes of what took place so that similar incidents can be avoided in the future. [...] Among the neighboring countries of Southeast Asia, none seems more similar to Thailand than Cambodia [...] Both nations share similar

⁶⁸ Alexander Hinton, “Khmerness and the Thai ‘Other’: Violence, Discourse and Symbolism in the 2003 Anti-Thai Riots in Cambodia,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 37, No. 3 (2006): p. 446.

⁶⁹ For additional accounts about the riot, see *ibid.*, pp. 445-468.

customs, traditions, beliefs, and ways of life. This is especially true of royal customs, language, writing systems, vocabulary, literature, and the dramatic arts. In light of these similarities, it seems surprising, therefore, that relations between Thailand and Cambodia should be characterized by deep-seated “ignorance, misunderstanding, and prejudice.”⁷⁰

Similarly, Serhat Unaldi argued that “Without an understanding of the ideological construction of Angkor as the focal point of Cambodian identity, it is not possible to comprehend the driving force behind the incident.”⁷¹

The above-mentioned scholarly works offer a lens to view Khmer-Thai antagonistic relations through the analyses of historical narratives and (mis-)construction of past relations between the two countries. Yet, they do not take into account the domestic politics behind the anti-Thai riots in 2003. What should be pointed out is the fact that from January 18 to the riot on January 29, the Cambodian government did not seem to take any serious measures to contain the people’s anger over this issue. More importantly, on the day of the riots, there was little effort by the Cambodian authorities to calm the situation before it got out of hand. In fact, the then-Thai ambassador Chatchawed Chartsuwan had tried to seek intervention from the Cambodian ministries of foreign affairs and interior, but claimed that the Cambodian authorities did little to help; he only managed to escape through the back fence of the embassy by speedboat that was sent to help by some Thai people. Later, the owner of the Beehive Radio Station Mam Sonando (a well-known critic of the government) was

⁷⁰ See Charnvit Kasetsiri, “Thailand-Cambodia: A Love-Hate Relationship,” *Kyoto Review of Southeast Asia* 3 (March 2003). Accessible at: http://kyotoreview.cseas.kyoto-u.ac.jp/issue/issue2/article_242.html.

⁷¹ Serhat Unaldi, “Reconstructing Angkor: Images of the Past and Their Impact on Thai-Cambodian Relations,” *Institut für Asien- und Afrikawissenschaften*, Philosophische Fakultät III der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Südostasien Working Papers No. 33 (Berlin: 2008), p. 5.

arrested, along with the editor of *Rasmei Kampuchea*, for 1) spreading misleading information; 2) inciting racial hatred between Cambodia and Thailand; and 3) exacerbating the riots.⁷² Cambodian NGO ADHOC opined at that time that:

It is believed a political blaming game was played to trap and capture democratic supporters who were in favor of public critical opinion. For instance Mr. Mam Sonando was arrested although he did not participate in the riot. The riot had started before someone spoke on a show broadcasted by his radio station so that program cannot be linked to the violent events. He (Sonando) may be accused only of allowing that person to speak. The public view is that the arrest of Mr. Mam Sonando is really a political excuse as his radio station has been threatened many times with closure.⁷³

Similarly, Simon Springer asserted that:

While law enforcement was conspicuously absent for hours as the protest raged in front of the Thai Embassy [...], the government response since has been to crackdown on virtually every protest or demonstration in the name of “order” and “stability” [...] This response appears to be little more than a pretext to strip people of their constitutional rights, most prominently freedom of assembly, via the denial of access to public space. [...] there is some evidence that the anti-Thai riots may have been fomented by CPP elements to serve as a pretext for the RGC’s renewed crackdown on public space.⁷⁴

Pavin Chachavalpungpun also rightly pointed out that:

A Cambodian general election was around the corner and the conflict with Thailand could have been used to favour or undermine certain political factions. The opposition party blamed Hun Sen for his plot to divert the public attention on his government’s inability to wipe out corruption and its willingness to allow Vietnamese to run in the election under his party, Cambodian People’s Party (CPP).⁷⁵

⁷² ADHOC, “Monitoring Report on Riots against the Thai Embassy in Phnom Penh from 29-31 January 2003,” http://www.bigpond.com.kh/users/adhoc/publication/riot_29_01_03/monitoring_riot_report.htm. Accessed December 28, 2013.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Simon Springer, *Cambodia’s Neoliberal Order: Violence, Authoritarianism, and the Contestation of Public Space* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), p. 123.

⁷⁵ Pavin Chachavalpungpun, *Reinventing Thailand*, p. 175.

Following the riots, Phnom Penh's then governor Chea Sophara, an increasingly popular CPP politician (who had been tipped by some to challenge Hun Sen as a PM candidate), was sacked.⁷⁶

Thailand's response was swift and firm: diplomatic relations were downgraded, the border was closed, and thousands of Cambodian traders, beggars and laborers were evicted from Thailand. Thailand also demanded an apology, an investigation, arrests, and compensation for the damages incurred.⁷⁷ Cambodia was apologetic and agreed to pay compensation worth about US\$50 million.

Given the high cost of the riots, it is unclear whether the incidents were truly politically motivated and got out of control, or that they were spontaneous and unmanageable. The available circumstantial evidence (especially the lack of efforts on the part of the authorities to control the problem) and the plausible domestic political calculations discussed above make the former scenario a more likely one. But what was certain was that no long-term diplomatic fallout was intended to be the result of the riots. In any case, normalization did not happen instantly. At first, Thailand reopened the border but forbid Thai people from entering Cambodia to gamble at the border casinos or visit tourist sites. Frustrated, Hun Sen lashed out at Thailand for having a "superiority complex" and threatened to pursue trades with other Southeast Asian countries. But after Cambodia made the initial installment of the compensation sum, compromise was reached and relations were normalized. Chachavalpungpun wrote that:

⁷⁶ Michael Freeman, *Cambodia* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 2004), pp. 59-60.

⁷⁷ Alexander Hinton, "Khmerness and the Thai 'Other,'" p. 450.

The Thai Foreign Ministry was told to downplay the violent incident in Phnom Penh, for the sake of diplomatic normalization with Cambodia. In fact, the Thai public had never been clearly informed of the process of compensation for the damage of Thai properties in Phnom Penh.⁷⁸

Alexander Hinton summarized the turn of events as follows:

Thaksin was referring to the riots as a ‘minor incident’ that had been due to a ‘misunderstanding’, and the Thai government announced that an agreement had been made about the compensation issue. After Cambodia transferred almost \$6 million to pay for damages to the Thai Embassy, both borders were reopened on 21 March. In addition, the governments established a commission to examine their bilateral relations. Diplomatic ties were normalized on 11 April, and on 24 April Ambassador Chatchawed returned to Phnom Penh, saying, ‘let bygones be bygones’. Finally, coming full circle, Hun Sen lifted the ban on Thai soap operas.⁷⁹

6.7. Restoring good-neighbors’ relations (2003-2008)

Once diplomatic relations were restored, investments and cross-border trades resumed. While bilateral trade in 2002 reached US\$445 million, the figure rose to US\$1 billion in 2006.⁸⁰ Even after Thaksin was ousted by the coup in late 2006, relations between Thailand and Cambodia were not severely affected, given that the successive Thai governments under Somchai Wongsawat and Samak Sundaravej were little more than proxies of Thaksin. In fact, even after he was ousted, Thaksin

⁷⁸ Pavin Chachavalpongpun, *Reinventing Thailand*, p. 175. Neither was the compensation a transparent process on the Cambodian side. But based on a WikiLeaks cable from the U.S. embassy in Phnom Penh, CPP Senator Kok An “was reportedly one of the people who helped pay the US\$50 million in compensation to Thailand for damage to the Thai Embassy during the anti-Thai riots in early 2003, according to Director General of the Cambodian Chamber of Commerce Meng Tech (PROTECT).” See WikiLeaks Cable 07PHNOMPENH1034, “Cambodia’s Top Ten Tycoons,” <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2007/08/07PHNOMPENH1034.html>. Accessed January 21, 2014.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 450-451.

⁸⁰ Vannarith Chheang, “Cambodia’s Economic Relations with Thailand and Vietnam,” *Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace*, Working Paper No. 25 (Phnom Penh: 2008), p. 12.

continued to have meetings with Hun Sen over the business opportunities he was eyeing for in Koh Kong province. According to Paul Chambers and Siegfried Wolf:

In May 2008 it was announced that former Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra was planning to open a casino on Koh Kong, on the Cambodian side of the maritime frontier and was pushing to make Koh Kong into a special economic zone. This development occurred simultaneous to the establishment of Road 48 (built with Thai Bhat 1 billion) which would link Koh Kong to the Laem Chabang port in Chonburi, Thailand.⁸¹

In December 2007, the two countries agreed in principle to introduce the “Single Visa” scheme to facilitate tourists’ entry, i.e. tourists need to apply for their visa at a single place only in order to visit Cambodia and Thailand.⁸² (It was not until December 2012, however, that the plan was actually implemented between Cambodia and Thailand under Yingluck’s administration.) As the tourism industry was booming in Siem Reap during the 2000s, Thailand also became a major supplier of electricity and tourism-related foodstuff and products.⁸³

Thailand has been a major destination for Cambodian workers since as early as 1994, and it was estimated in 2006 that close to 200,000 Cambodians were working in Thailand, though many of them were undocumented. Following the signing of MoU on labor cooperation between Cambodia and Thailand on May 31, 2003 (which spelled out how to send new migrant workers legally) and registration rounds conducted by the Thai government (which offered opportunities for undocumented

⁸¹ Paul W. Chambers and Siegfried O. Wolf, “Image-Formation at a Nation’s Edge: Thai Perceptions of Its Dispute with Cambodia – Implications for South Asia,” *Heidelberg Papers in South Asian and Comparative Politics*, Working Paper No. 52 (February 2010): p. 15.

⁸² Vannarith Chheang, “Angkor Heritage Tourism and the Issues of Sustainability: A Triangular Perceptions Perspective” (PhD diss., Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University, 2009), p. 125.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 210.

workers to register) in 2004, some 110,000 Cambodian migrant workers were able to receive their legal work permits. Official statistics from the Cambodian labor ministry indicated that between 2006 and 2008, more than 8,000 Cambodian migrant workers legally sought jobs in Thailand.⁸⁴

Other proposed joint projects between Cambodia and Thailand, namely the Emerald Triangle Cooperation (which would include golf courses and entertainment complexes in the Thai-Lao-Cambodian joint border area)⁸⁵ and oil shares in the Overlapping Claims Area in the Gulf of Thailand, however, have not materialized. Obstacles to these plans are both technical and political. In the case of the Emerald Triangle Project, the problems included lingering landmines, un-demarcated boundaries, lack of local infrastructure, and protests from Thai environmentalists citing the possible damage to the watershed in Ubon Ratchathani province that would be caused by the proposed project. As for the sharing of oil in the Overlapping Claims Area (approximately 26,000 square-kilometers) in the Gulf of Thailand, negotiations took place throughout the Thaksin years (2001-2006), but disagreements over how to divide the area and revenues have hindered agreements on the issue. Furthermore, the Preah Vihear conflict in 2008 and allegations from anti-Thaksin forces in Thailand that he was selling out Thai territory to Cambodia rendered any talks in the sea border area a politically difficult task to achieve.

⁸⁴ See Chan Sophal, "Economic Costs and Benefits of Labour Migration: Case of Cambodia" in Hossein Jalilian (ed.), *Costs and Benefits of Cross-Country Labour Migration* (Singapore: ISEAS, 2012), pp. 118-189.

⁸⁵ In an address in Laos in August 2003, Cambodian foreign affairs minister Hor Namhong made the case that the development of the Emerald Triangle could help strengthen pro-poor growth by: i) stimulating growth in poor border areas; ii) facilitating access to markets through infrastructure development; iii) responding to the special needs of ethnic minorities and other vulnerable groups; and iv) reducing the marginal cost of services (such as telecommunications and electricity). See "The Emerald Triangle Development Cooperation: A Cambodian View" in Hor Namhong, *Cambodia's Foreign Policy, 1998-2003* (Phnom Penh: unknown publisher, 2004).

On the security front, before July 2008, there was a perception in the Cambodian administration of a prevailing amity within the region. In a defense white paper published in 2006, it was concluded that:

[...] there is no indication of external military threats to the Kingdom of Cambodia for the present time as well as for the short and medium term future. This conclusion is based on the favourable conditions along all borders around Cambodia. Although some problems continue to exist such as unclear demarcation of the border line, and the Mongtagnard ethnic minority migration, resolution with authorities and governments of neighbouring countries has been made patiently and diplomatically.⁸⁶

6.8. The hostage of Thai domestic politics (2008-2014)

Relations between Cambodia and Thailand became strained in late 2008 after the anti-Thaksin Democrat Party came to power through maneuvers in the Parliament. As diplomatic relations deteriorated, deadly clashes also took place along the border areas. Good relationships only returned after Thaksin's youngest sister, Yingluck Shinawatra, won the national election in Thailand in July 2011. It is not the intention and it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to discuss recent Cambodia-Thailand relations in thorough detail. Reports and academic works on this topic have been written extensively by various scholars or produced by research think tanks over the past 5 years.⁸⁷ Still, it is worth providing a brief summary of the relationship between the two countries as empirical discussion toward the concluding remarks of this chapter.

⁸⁶ Ministry of National Defense, Royal Government of Cambodia, "Defending the Kingdom of Cambodia: Security, Development and International Cooperation," (Phnom Penh, August 2006), p. 23.

⁸⁷ See, for example, Pavin Chachavalpungpun, "Embedding Embittered History: Unending Conflicts in Thai-Cambodian Relations," *Asian Affairs*, Vol. 43, No. 1 (March 2012): pp. 81-102; and International Crisis Group, "Waging Peace: ASEAN and the Thai-Cambodian Border Conflict," *Asian Report No. 215*, Bangkok/Jakarta/Brussels, December 2011.

In July 2008, Cambodians celebrated the successful enlistment of the Preah Vihear temple as a World Heritage Site (UNESCO). During the application process, Cambodia's proposal was supported by the Thai government under Thai PM Samak Sundaravej, with the condition stated in the Joint Communiqué that "In the spirit of goodwill and conciliation, the Kingdom of Cambodia accepts that the Temple of Preah Vihear be nominated for inscription on the World Heritage List without at this stage a buffer zone on the northern and western areas of the Temple" (see **Appendix 4**).⁸⁸ But as Helaine Silverman rightly observed:

However, this official Thai support for the Cambodian nomination was made within the context of fractious Thai internal politics, which subsequently exploded when the Thai government was thrown into disarray as the Central Administrative Court ruled that 'the entire cabinet had violated the charter by not seeking parliamentary approval for a deal with Cambodia over [the] disputed temple' (*Bangkok Post*, 30 December 2009). Foreign Minister Nappadon Pattama had to resign (on 10 July 2008).⁸⁹

Mounting protests following the successful inscription from the Thai opposition Democrat Party and the People's Alliance for Democracy (who accused the Thai government of selling out to Cambodia) eventually prompted the Thai government to recalibrate their stance by appearing more confrontational to Cambodia. Meanwhile, military tension and skirmishes over the temple area also occurred.⁹⁰ Though the initial tension with Thailand arose during this time, the Cambodian government understood that this was driven more by Thai domestic politics and power struggles

⁸⁸ Office of the Council of Ministers-RGC, "Joint Communiqué, 18 June 2008," (Phnom Penh, Cambodia: 2008).

⁸⁹ Helaine Silverman, "Border Wars: The Ongoing Temple Dispute between Thailand and Cambodia and UNESCO's World Heritage List," *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (January 2011): p. 7.

⁹⁰ See Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR), "Blurred Boundaries: A Briefing Note on the Cambodian-Thai Border Tensions" (Phnom Penh: July 2011).

rather than by real problems between the two governments at the time. Still, according to a WikiLeaks cable, in a meeting with former U.S. ambassador to Cambodia Joseph Mussomeli, Hun Manet (Hun Sen's eldest son and head of the counter-terrorism unit) "wondered whether Cambodia's patience and low-key approach to Thailand's military incursion into territory long occupied by Cambodia had not been a mistake." The cable also noted: "Manet argued that it appears that while the initial incursion onto Cambodian soil had not been authorized by the Thai government, that government now saw potential territorial gains from a more aggressive policy regarding border issues."⁹¹

On the Cambodian side, the border conflict also helped to bolster PM Hun Sen's legitimacy at home. As Nelson Rand rightly suggested:

Nationalist sentiment in Cambodia has also been stoked over the dispute, while Prime Minister Hun Sen has certainly exploited the conflict to his advantage. Analysts say his aggressive posture towards the issue and his refusal to be pushed around by Thailand has boosted his popularity and has strengthened his power. Interestingly, the commander of Cambodian troops overseeing this latest round of fighting at Preah Vihear was Hun Sen's eldest son, Major-General Hun Manet. The 33-year-old West Point Graduate has rapidly moved up the ranks of the Cambodian military, a clear sign that Hun Sen is further consolidating his power.⁹²

Tension between Cambodia and Thailand intensified further after December 2008, when the leader of the Democrat Party, Abhisit Vejjajiva, became prime minister following the removal of Somchai Wongsawat (Thaksin's brother in law) by the Constitutional Court of Thailand. Although Abhisit had the support from PAD, the

⁹¹ WikiLeaks Cable 08PHNOMPENH664, "Preah Vihear: Less Tension; More Concern," <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2008/08/08PHNOMPENH664.html>. Accessed January 14, 2014.

⁹² Nelson Rand, "Nationalism & the Thai-Cambodia[n] Border Conflict" in *Asian Conflicts Reports*, Issue 16 (March-April 2011): p. 2.

Thai military, and Democrat Party's supporters in Bangkok and in the southern provinces, he faced an enormous challenge from Thaksin's supporters, also known as the "Red Shirts," who later staged many protests in Bangkok only to be violently suppressed by the Thai government, making headlines around the world. It is therefore not surprising that the Thai government under Abhisit also took a hard line on the border issue against Cambodia. The disagreement eventually shifted from the ownership of the temple itself to the 4.6 square-kilometer adjacent area, as both sides claimed sovereignty over it. Relations between the two countries took a dramatic turn when Hun Sen provocatively appointed Thaksin, who was in exile, as an economic advisor to the Cambodian government in November 2009, in defiance of Thailand's request for Cambodia to extradite Thaksin to Thailand based on the extradition agreement signed between the two countries in 1999. Cambodia cited political motivation behind the trial of Thaksin, who had been sentenced to two years imprisonment in absentia by Thailand's Supreme Court for violating the conflict of interest rules over a corrupt land deal. As Pavin Chachavalpungpun aptly put it, "In the past, Thailand helped the Khmer Rouge. Now, Cambodia is helping the Thai Rouge."⁹³

In protest, Thailand recalled her ambassador from Cambodia on November 5, 2009; Cambodia followed suit the next day. On Nov 10, The Abhisit Vejjajiva administration approved Thailand's foreign ministry's proposal to revoke the 2001 MoU on overlapping maritime boundaries. In December that year, Sivarak Chutipong, a Thai engineer at the Thai-Cambodian Air Traffic Services, was arrested on the

⁹³ A comment made during his presentation on "Cambodia-Thailand Relations: Problems and Prospect" at CICP in February 2012.

charge of espionage for giving Thaksin's flight details to the Thai embassy in Cambodia. He was sentenced to seven years of imprisonment, but was freed later after receiving a royal pardon from King Sihamoni following another Thaksin's visit to Cambodia.⁹⁴ Sokbunthoeun So cited some reasons that prompted the Cambodian government to make the risky move to interfere in Thai politics and provoking the militarily more equipped Thai government in siding with the ousted Thaksin Shinawatra: Thailand's dependence on Cambodia's market for Thai products and the ongoing insurgency in the Thai south. And as he rightly suggested, "If Thaksin can help to boost the CPP's legitimacy by promoting trade and investment in Cambodia through his personal business connections, this will continue to increase the CPP's popularity and therefore appears to be a worthwhile risk to the CPP."⁹⁵ Hun Sen's strong ties with Thaksin and perhaps his prediction of Thaksin's possible future return to the central role in Thai politics might have also prompted him to decide to make the risky move.

There were hopes of improved relations in late August 2010 when Thaksin decided to quit his post as an economic adviser to the Cambodian government, citing his personal difficulties in fulfilling his role effectively. Immediately afterward, ambassadors to both countries were reappointed. Early that month, to mark the 60th anniversary of the two countries' relationships, both sides agreed to waive visa requirements for each other's citizens.

⁹⁴ Bangkok Post, "Convicted Thai Spy Released from Cambodian Jail," <http://www.bangkokpost.com/news/asia/162690/convicted-thai-spy-released-from-cambodian-jail>. Accessed July 5, 2011.

⁹⁵ Sokbunthoeun So, "The Cambodia-Thailand Conflict: A Test for ASEAN," *Asia Pacific Bulletin* (The East-West Center), No. 44 (December 10, 2009): p. 2.

At the end of 2010, however, Democrat Party's MP for Bangkok Panich Vikitsreth, Veeera Somkwamkid (co-leader of the Thailand Patriot Network) and five other Thais were arrested for intruding into Cambodian soil. While others were eventually released, Veera Somkwamkid and his secretary were sentenced to 8 and 6 years, respectively, and have since been imprisoned in Cambodia in spite of intervention efforts by the Thai government. In February 2011 (and later again in April), deadly clashes took place along the border; both sides accused each other of initiating the attacks. The February clashes "resulted in casualties and large displacements of villagers on both sides, as well as damage to the temple itself."⁹⁶ As Nelson Rand pointed out, "the fighting also coincided with protests in Bangkok by the ultra-nationalist 'yellow-shirt' movement, which called on the government of Abhisit Vejjajiva [their former ally] to take a tougher stance on the border dispute with Cambodia."⁹⁷

Cambodia and Thailand had initially sought to deal with the conflict bilaterally but to no avail. At first, Cambodia's frustration with ASEAN's and the UN's structural weaknesses in interventions had led Cambodia to try to deal with Thailand bilaterally.⁹⁸ Following the clashes in February 2011, however, while Thailand continued to insist that the dispute be solved through bilateral mechanisms, Cambodia had sought international intervention. The United Nations had referred the issue to ASEAN, when Indonesia was serving as Chair of the 10-member association. But as Murray Hiebert and Amy Killian noted: "ASEAN was unable to mitigate the dispute.

⁹⁶ CCHR, "Blurred Boundaries," p. 14.

⁹⁷ Nelson Rand, "Nationalism & the Thai-Cambodia[n] Border Conflict," p. 1.

⁹⁸ See Leng Thearith, *ASEAN Security and Its Relevancy* (CICP E-Book No. 1) (Phnom Penh: CICP, 2009), pp. 55-59.

Both sides originally agreed to permit Indonesian observers to monitor a ceasefire. Thailand, however, reversed its decision when the military, claiming observers undermined the country's national sovereignty, refused to support the mission."⁹⁹ On April 28, 2011, Cambodia submitted a request to the ICJ to interpret its 1962 ruling with regard to the disputed territory around the temple.

Between late 2008 and July 2011 (when the Democrat Party held power in Thailand), nationalist rhetoric intensified in both countries. Diplomatic press releases, the media, and comments expressed by users on social-networking sites reflected mutual dislike and distrust between the two nations. For example, Cambodia erected a sign at the entrance to the Preah Vihear temple that reads: "I have pride to be born as Khmer." *Cambodia Beer* (a new beer brand in Cambodia) also features Preah Vihear temple as its logo. So did many TV channels news stage backgrounds and some Khmer songs. News and analyses about the border conflict between Cambodia and Thailand dominated the media in both countries with varying degrees of bias on both sides. During this period, one could be forgiven for thinking that Cambodia and Thailand had always been enemies since time immemorial. Statistics from the Cambodian Ministry of Tourism between 2008 and 2012 also showed that while the total arrivals to Cambodia were on the rise, the number of arrivals from Thailand experienced a decline between 2008 and 2011, but rose again after 2011 (see Table 2).¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Murray Hiebert and Amy Killian, "Thailand, Cambodia Spar at UN Court over Preah Vihear Temple," *Center for Strategic and International Studies* (April 23, 2013). Accessed April 14, 2014 at: <https://csis.org/publication/thailand-cambodia-spar-un-court-over-preah-vihear-temple>.

¹⁰⁰ See Ministry of Tourism-RGC, "Touristic Statistics Report," http://www.tourismcambodia.org/mot/index.php?view=statistic_report. Accessed January 23, 2014.

Table 2: Tourist Arrivals to Cambodia (2008-2012)

Country of Origin	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Thailand	109,020	102,018	96,277	116,758	201,422
Overall	2,125,465	2,161,577	2,508,289	2,881,862	3,584,307

However, when Thaksin's sister's party, Pheu Thai Party, won a landslide victory in Thailand's national election in July 2011, Cambodian foreign minister Hor Nam Hong reportedly remarked that "It's obvious - we cannot hide that we are happy with the Pheu Thai Party's victory."¹⁰¹ As soon as the election result was announced, Yingluck declared that her government's urgent task would be to restore bilateral relations with neighboring countries. Although she did not say explicitly, it was widely believed that her reference was made to Cambodia.¹⁰² Since then, Cambodian-Thai relations have been relatively amicable. Prime Minister Yingluck of Thailand paid an official visit to Cambodia in mid-September 2011. This was followed by a friendly football match later that same month between two mixed Cambodian-Thai teams comprising high ranking officials from both sides, for which PM Hun Sen of Cambodia wore a red T-shirt in symbolic support of the new Thai government.

Overall, relations have turned for the better since Yingluck came to power in Thailand. Nonetheless, the ongoing political problems in Thailand means that Yingluck has to tread a thin line in her dealings with Cambodia, especially on such

¹⁰¹ Supalak Ganjanakhundee, "Restoration of Relations with Cambodia a 'Priority'," <http://www.nationmultimedia.com/2011/07/05/national/Restoration-of-relations-with-Cambodia-a-priority-30159463.html>. Accessed July 5, 2011.

¹⁰² Ibid.

sensitive issues as border conflict-related negotiations.¹⁰³ This is most evident in her careful position in (not) implementing the recent ICJ's interpretation of its 1962 ruling (which Cambodia had made a request to the Court in late April 2011) on the sovereignty of the vicinity area around the Preah Vihear temple. As the editor of the *Phnom Penh Post* recently suggested:

The International Court of Justice ruled in November [2013] that the promontory on which Preah Vihear temple sits is Cambodian territory. Thailand, however, has yet to officially accept the ruling. Cambodia has been patient, with Information Minister Khieu Kanharith saying in November that the government would not “rush” Thailand's implementation of the ruling. But with Thai Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra's future uncertain as the political situation in Bangkok continues to deteriorate, it is unknown if and when Thailand will accept the ICJ's decision.¹⁰⁴

Even prior to the ruling, some conservative establishments in Thailand (including some Senators) had strongly urged Yingluck's government not to accept the ICJ's forthcoming ruling, which they predicted would be in favor of Cambodia.¹⁰⁵

It should be pointed out that the ICJ's November 2013 interpretation of the 1962 verdict did not rule entirely in favor of Cambodia's expectation of full sovereignty over the disputed 4.6 square-kilometer area (see **Appendix 5**). The promontory on which Preah Vihear temple sits constitutes roughly only half the size of the disputed

¹⁰³ In fact, even the United States and China's cooperation with Yingluck's government has also come under fire from the Thai opposition, which accused the government of selling out to foreign interests. See Sasiwan Chingchit, “Political Crisis in Thailand and Its Impacts on Foreign Relations,” *Institute for Defence Studies & Analyses (IDSA) Issue Brief*, New Delhi (India), January 22, 2014.

¹⁰⁴ The Editor, “Dates Unknown: These Things Could All Happen in 2014 But Don't Bet on When,” *Phnom Penh Post*, <http://www.phnompenhpost.com/7days/dates-unknown-these-things-could-all-happen-2014-don%E2%80%99t-bet-when>. Accessed January 10, 2014.

¹⁰⁵ Pou Sothirak, “The Border Conflict with Thailand,” p. 16.

area; it does not include Phnom Trap, over which Cambodia also claims sovereignty.

John Ciorciari opined that:

The ICJ's interpretation of the *Preah Vihear* decision again leaves ample scope for discord. [Cambodian Foreign Minister] Hor Namhong has already stated that the Court's invocation of the Annex I map line means that Phnom Trap is Cambodian—a position certain to elicit a negative Thai response. In recent months, both the Thai and Cambodian governments have been under severe pressure from opposition groups, and the incentives to take hard-line positions remain strong on both sides, raising the danger that talks over the details of the ruling and the status of Phnom Trap will again spiral toward conflict.¹⁰⁶

As of this writing, both governments have refrained from pushing forward with implementing the ICJ's ruling, understandably because both governments prioritized cooperation and have preferred to leave aside the contentious issue of border disagreement. John Ciorciari rightly pointed out that:

[The] flexibility [of the ICJ's ruling] also has its role. The exercise of caution on setting strict boundaries and deciding on Phnom Trap has helped insulate the Court from charges of overreach. It has also enabled both sides to claim a partial victory, which is especially important in Thailand, where the incumbent government has faced intense campaign of opposition protests organized by nationalist “yellow shirts” with strong links to the military. A more decisive ruling in favor of Cambodia would have risked a significant backlash in Thailand.¹⁰⁷

Cambodia and Thailand have thus far maintained normal and cooperative relations. Both governments have reiterated their commitment to restart negotiations over joint exploration in the Overlapping Claims Area, although they have yet to set a date for

¹⁰⁶ John D. Ciorciari, “International Decision: Request for Interpretation of the Judgment of 15 June 1962 in the Case Concerning the *Temple of Preah Vihear* (Cambodia v. Thailand) (Cambodia v. Thailand),” *American Journal of International Law*, Vol. 108, No. 2 (April 2014): p. 7.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8.

the talks.¹⁰⁸ Trade relations between the two countries reached US\$4.5 billion in 2013, a 12% increase from the previous year, raising Cambodia's 2013 trade deficit with Thailand to US\$3.8billion – a 7.8% increase from last year.¹⁰⁹ In late January 2014, Thai Naval Special Warfare Commander Winai Klom-in alleged that ten vans of Cambodians had crossed the border into Thailand but were not stopped by police, while the anti-government protest leader Suthep Thaugsuban reckoned that a special “Cambodian warfare” unit could have been involved in the shooting of Sutin Tharatin, a leader of the *People's Democratic Force to Overthrow Thaksinism* and an ally of Suthep. Koy Koung, the Cambodian foreign affairs ministry spokesperson, flatly rejected the allegation and claimed that the reports were also officially rejected by the Thai Foreign Ministry in communications with the Cambodian embassy in Bangkok.¹¹⁰

Still, an issue that is contentious but not serious enough (from the governments' point of view) to jeopardize the two nations' relations is the continued shooting by Thai border securities forces of Cambodians crossing into Thailand for illegal logging. On March 21, 2014, Thai ambassador to Cambodia Pakdi Touchayoot was summoned by

¹⁰⁸ In late August 2011, the Cambodian National Petroleum Authority alleged that secret meetings between high-ranking Thai and Cambodian officials to solve the demarcation of disputed offshore petroleum resources had taken place during the administration of Thai Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva, and claimed that Abhisit had “wildly accused [deposed former Thai Prime Minister] Thaksin Shinawatra, who openly worked with Cambodia, of having secret interests with Cambodia”; the statement further accused Abhisit of “attempting to derail” any future talks between Cambodia and the newly elected Thai government, and claimed that “Cambodia is obliged to reveal this secret in order to protect the interests of Cambodia and H.E. Thaksin Shinawatra against the baseless allegations made on the part of the Democrats.” See Tom Brennan and Vong Sokheng, “Oil Dispute Flares up,” *Phnom Penh Post* (August 31, 2011), <http://www.phnompenhpost.com/business/oil-dispute-flares>. Accessed April 18, 2014.

¹⁰⁹ Sisavuthara Sim, “Cambodia's Trade Deficit with Thailand Rises 7.8% to \$3.8bn in 2013,” TONGYANG Securities (Cambodia) Plc., *TYS Cambodia Daily* (February 7, 2014).

¹¹⁰ Kevin Ponniah, “Suthep's Claims ‘Pure Fantasy’: Gov't,” *Phnom Penh Post*. <http://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/suthep%E2%80%99s-claims-pure-%E2%80%98fantasy%E2%80%99gov%E2%80%99t>. Accessed April 1, 2014.

the Cambodian Foreign Affairs Ministry over the shooting death a week earlier of a Cambodian man who was among nine allegedly logging in Thailand. In 2013 alone, 33 Cambodian illegal loggers were reportedly shot to death by Thai soldiers. According to Koy Kuong, the spokesperson of the Cambodian ministry, “This is an act that the Cambodian government notes is against international humanitarian law, and is not an act that occurs in countries with the rule of law [...] We need the Thai authorities to obey their state laws and just punish [illegal Cambodian loggers] by law.”¹¹¹

More importantly, however, what renders Cambodia-Thailand relations uncertain in the longer run is the fact that Yingluck’s government is currently facing ongoing protests from her conservative ultra-nationalist opponents, and the likelihood of another military coup in Thailand still hanging in the air.¹¹² I concur with Pou Sothirak, who recently argued that:

Although the border situation has improved, a lasting solution still hinges on positive improvement in the internal politics of either or both countries. [...] To achieve a desirable goal, the military threat must be removed and sincere dialogue must prevail. Without a lasting solution to the border conflict between Cambodia and Thailand, the two countries cannot have [permanently] good bilateral relations and conflicts may flair up again creating security concerns at the border and disturbing peace in the region as well as damaging the reputation of ASEAN.¹¹³

¹¹¹ Saing Soenthrith, “Cambodia Summons Thai Ambassador over Deaths of Loggers,” *The Cambodia Daily*, <http://www.cambodiadaily.com/news/cambodia-summons-thai-ambassador-over-deaths-of-loggers-54766/>. Accessed March 24, 2014.

¹¹² Paul Chambers, “Mediating the Mayhem? The Military and Thailand’s Slide toward Pandemonium,” *E-IR* (February 27, 2014). Accessible at: <http://www.e-ir.info/2014/02/27/mediating-the-mayhem-the-military-and-thailands-slide-toward-pandemonium/>. For a highly critical view of the Thai conservative establishments (particularly the monarchy) and the latest anti-Yingluck protests, see Andrew M. Marshall, “Thailand’s Era of Insanity,” *ZENJOURNALIST* (October 31, 2013). Accessible at: <http://www.zenjournalist.com/2013/10/%E0%B8%81%E0%B8%A5%E0%B8%B5%E0%B8%A2%E0%B8%B8%E0%B8%84-thailands-era-of-insanity/>.

¹¹³ Pou Sothirak, “The Border Conflict with Thailand,” p. 17.

6.9. Conclusion

After the end of the Cold War, the relationship between Cambodia and Thailand appeared to be heading toward normalization and cooperation. As discussed in the preceding chapter, the domestic changes in Thailand by the late 1980s (under PM Chatichai Choonhavan) had already augured in a positive change in the two countries' relations. Following the signing of the Paris Peace Agreements in October 1991, diplomatic relations were re-established. Yet, while the global post-Cold War politics paved the way for improved relationships between the two nations, domestic politics of both countries were not equally conducive. Although the Khmer Rouge no longer received aid from the major global powers (especially China) that had backed them during the 1980s, they were able to sustain and launch their guerilla attacks on Cambodians throughout the 1990s from their strongholds in the western parts of Cambodia through gemstone and timber trade deals with Thai business-military groups. Thailand was denounced by the international community for permitting such transactions. However, the Thai civilian governments at the time were under even stronger pressure from the local military-business interest groups who had business deals with the Khmer Rouge at stake. At the same time, Thailand restored diplomatic relations with the Royal Government of Cambodia, which ushered in much needed aid, cross-border trades, and direct investments, mostly from the former into the latter. Under such circumstances, the Cambodian government was willing to overlook Thailand's business ties with the outlawed Khmer Rouge. It was only in late 1996 that Hun Sen's Win-Win strategy was able to take advantage of the internal divisions

within the rival Khmer Rouge factions and opened the process for their subsequent reintegration into the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces.

The rise of Thaksin Shinawatra in Thai politics in the late 1990s, and Hun Sen's emergence as the dominant political figure in Cambodia after 1998, helped forge closer ties between the two countries. Thaksin's pro-business foreign policy in the region was received warmly by Hun Sen's "neo-liberal"¹¹⁴ government in Cambodia. Save for the brief diplomatic rupture following the early 2003 riots in Phnom Penh (which had to do more with domestic politics in Cambodia), relations between Thailand and Cambodia from 1993 to 2008 were by and large amicable, especially during Thaksin's term (2001-2006). Cambodia's proposal to inscribe the Preah Vihear temple as a World Heritage Site was supported by Thaksin's proxy government under PM Samak Sundaravej. But the temple issue immediately became a hostage in Thai domestic power struggles, which eventually saw a military-backed opposition Democrat Party come to power in late 2008. Between December 2008 and July 2011, relations between Cambodia and Thailand reached rock bottom, with strong mutual distrust, frequent exchanges of accusations and counter-accusations in diplomatic press releases and in the media, and worse, occasional deadly military clashes along

¹¹⁴ The term "neo-liberal" here refers to regimes which adopt the economic part of liberalism, though not necessarily the full ideology. American political scientist Phillips Shively cited China as an example, "whose communist government maintains tight control over politics and speech but has hugely opened the economy." See W. Phillips Shively, *Power and Choice: An Introduction to Political Science*, 10th edition (New York: McGraw Hill, 2007), p. 36. Cambodia since 1993 has had regularly-held national elections, though it is hardly a consolidated democracy. With no clear separation of power between the executive, the legislative, and the judiciary branches, the mainstream media clearly dominated by the ruling party, and the National Election Committee (NEC) being perceived as not neutral, Cambodia has been described as a "hybrid democracy" or "façade democracy." See, for example, Mark Kabaum, "Cambodia's Façade Democracy and European Assistance," *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, Vol. 30, No. 4 (2011): pp. 111-143.

the border. It was only after Thaksin's sister, Yingluck Shinawatra, won the national election in July 2011 that relations reverted back from hostility to friendship and cooperation again.

As in the four preceding chapters on Cambodia-Thailand relations during the Cold War period (1950-1991), it is argued that Cambodia-Thailand diplomatic relations can only be understood if we look beyond such factors as international power structure or embedded nationalism and historical animosity. This dissertation proposes instead that relations between the two nations should be examined through the "social conflict" analysis, which does not view the state as a single-unit actor, but comprising various power groups competing with one another and perceiving threats and pursuing foreign policy in accordance with their own ideology and strategic interests.

It has been shown that, both during and after the Cold War, when international power structure has already shifted, Cambodia and Thailand's relationship is shaped more by domestic factors than it is by regional or global balances of power. That is, the relationship is cooperative when both governments in power share mutual interests, ideology, and/or strategic alliances vis-à-vis other competing power groups at home. Conversely, the two countries' relationship experienced enmity when the governments in power do not share the above characteristics, and worse, if at least one side supports and holds alliance with the opposition/dissidents of the other. In other words, Cambodia's foreign policy toward Thailand, and vice versa, is not a product of a unified rationalization of national security as realists would suggest, but depends

rather on the perception of threat or opportunities pertaining to their own core interests when viewing the other side.

Throughout the 1990s, the Thai civilian government was under pressure from the military and business establishments to allow these groups to trade with the Khmer Rouge guerillas. Though the Cambodian government was not pleased with such partnerships, it was compensated by Thailand's official aid, border trades, and investments to Cambodia. The mutual business interests and cooperation between the two countries were strengthened further after the Khmer Rouge movement ended, but more importantly, when the pro-business PM Thaksin held power in Thailand between 2001 and 2006. Conversely, when the Democrat Party under Abhisit Vejjajiva ruled Thailand between late 2008 and July 2011, relations on governmental levels turned for the worst, while Hun Sen's government retained a close personal relationship with the self-exiled Thaksin. Once Yingluck came to power in July 2011, relations have been once again amicable. All this happened while regional balances of power have not changed substantially during the past decade.

Due to the anti-Thai riots in Phnom Penh in early 2003 and the recent Preah Vihear conflict, "embedded nationalism" and "historical animosity" became fashionable terms for scholars who write about Cambodian-Thai relations. While not denying their significance, these factors alone cannot explain the shift of diplomatic relations between Cambodia and Thailand in the post-Cold War era. That is, though nationalism is visibly an important factor, when does it induce conflicts, and when does it not? Admittedly, some scholars have acknowledged that domestic factors

should be considered – i.e. when a government lacks legitimacy, nationalism becomes a useful tool. Yet, I argue that nationalism is not simply invoked whenever there is a legitimacy crisis at home. Certainly, the lack of legitimacy is a major factor, but it is more likely to be instituted only when governments in the two countries do not share mutual ideology and/or strategic interests for their power bases at home.

Evidently, nationalism never became an issue in Cambodian-Thai relations during the 1990s. It was only in early 2003 that nationalism appeared to disrupt the two nation's relations. But as discussed earlier in this chapter, the problem most likely had more to do with Cambodian domestic politics in the context of a forthcoming national election and the declining of legitimacy of the incumbent government at stake. Yet, because the Cambodian and Thai governments then (under Hun Sen and Thaksin, respectively) shared substantial mutual business interests and did not have any ideological disagreement, the brief diplomatic rupture was immediately mended: diplomatic relations were normalized and trade relations resumed not long after the riots. On the other hand, nationalism had a more serious and longer-lasting effect on Cambodia and Thailand's relations between late 2008 and 2011, stemming from the domestic power struggles in Thailand. The Thai opposition accused Thaksin's proxy governments of selling out to Cambodia by supporting the Preah Vihear temple inscription and had support from the urban middle- and upper-middle classes concentrated in Bangkok, the established old guards of Thai political groups, as well as the Thai military. To bolster its legitimacy, the Abhisit government which came to power in December 2008 (but was not democratically elected) pursued a nationalistic and antagonistic stance against Cambodia to retain support from the aforementioned forces (especially

the military). Under such circumstances, Hun Sen's government also invoked nationalism to counter Thailand and boost domestic support for his government at home, while at the same time continued to retain his personal and business relationships with Thaksin. However, nationalism has ceased to be a major issue since Yingluck was elected in July 2011. Therefore, nationalism is not a constant variable that has lasting impacts on Cambodia-Thailand relations, or simply because one government lacks legitimacy at home, but depends also on the existence or absence of mutual strategic interests of the governments in power in both countries. Without that, nationalism is likely to emerge and become disruptive, as evident in the case of Thailand under Abhisit vis-à-vis Cambodia under Hun Sen.

Therefore, as also argued in the preceding chapters, international balances of power and nationalism or past historical animosities cannot satisfactorily explain the shifts of Cambodia-Thailand diplomatic relations. Certainly, the post-Cold War international politics have become more conducive for amity between Cambodia and Thailand. Likewise, nationalism and past animosities still remain issues in Cambodian and Thai memories. Yet, it is still domestic political factors (i.e. depending on which government is in power and what their interests are) that have continued to shape and affect relations between the two countries. The next and the last chapter of this dissertation will offer an overview of Cambodia-Thailand relations since the end of World War II to the present, as well as concluding remarks about the implications of possible relationship trends between Cambodia and Thailand in the foreseeable future.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

7.1. An overview of Cambodia-Thailand diplomatic relations since 1950

Since late 2008, scholarship on Cambodian-Thai diplomatic relations has tended to focus mainly on the Preah Vihear temple dispute and Cambodian-Thai border conflicts. Many scholars have suggested that “embedded nationalism” and “historical animosity” have continued to shape the two nations’ relations. While some scholars have recognized that Cambodian-Thai relations are tied to domestic issues (especially on the Thai side), analyses have been limited to focusing on contemporary Thai politics only.

This dissertation has attempted to provide a comprehensive analysis of Cambodian-Thai relations since the end of World War II to the present, during which several antagonistic regimes have taken power in Cambodia (and to a lesser extent, in Thailand as well). This research has consistently argued that, although it is useful to look at international balances of power (realist paradigm) and nationalism or historical antagonism (constructivism) as factors that shape the two countries’ relations, they must be viewed within the context of competing domestic factional politics, which have shaped the foreign policy choices in both countries to a large extent. This dissertation employs the “social conflict” analysis in seeking to explain Cambodian-Thai relations between 1950 and 2014. As cited earlier from Lee Jones:

[...] rather than seeing states as unitary actors responding to or securitizing threats, [...] we should analyze the way in which potential security issues are viewed by different societal forces operating upon and within the state and understand security policy as the outcome of

power struggles between these forces. *Different societal groups always evaluate potential security issues in relation to their own interests, ideologies, and strategies* (emphasis added). [...] One social group may perceive and discursively identify something as ‘threatening’, while others may be indifferent or even view the issue positively.¹

Following the apparent decline of the Khmer Empire in the 15th century, Cambodian politics had undergone a long period of dynastic feuds and foreign interventions/invasions, until the country became a French protectorate in 1863. During the 18th and the first half of the 19th centuries, it was not uncommon that different factions of the Khmer royalty fought one another and sought allied support and counter-support from the two more powerful neighboring states: Siam (Thailand) and Dai Viet (Vietnam). The 90-year French rule over Cambodia between 1863 and 1953 essentially reduced both neighbors’ influences over Cambodian affairs. While Vietnam also came under French colonial control, Siam was forced to relinquish its control over Cambodia and even ceded former Cambodian territories (such as Preah Vihear, Battambang, and Siem Reap) to the French authority. Still, Thailand continued to provide support to the Khmer Issarakhs who were fighting against French colonial control of Cambodia during the 1940s and 1950s.

As demonstrated in the preceding chapters of this dissertation, factional politics and foreign interventions/interferences persisted even after Cambodia gained its independence, though there were now more regional and global powers involved in such interventionism.

¹ Lee Jones, “Beyond Securitization: Explaining the Scope of Security Policy in Southeast Asia,” *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* (2011): p. 4.

In 1950, Thailand became the first country to recognize Cambodia as an associated state in the French union. Relations with Thailand in the early 1950s, though minimal, were far from hostile. In fact, Thai assistance was also provided to Cambodia in the forms of rehabilitation work and scholarships granted to Cambodian officials to receive training in Thailand in the fields of education, health, forestry, and meteorology. Relations began to be strained after Cambodia formally received independence from France in November 1953 following King Sihanouk's Royal Crusade for Independence. Prince Sihanouk's unfriendly relations with Thailand had already surfaced earlier when the Thai government had not welcomed Sihanouk's activities in Bangkok during his independence crusade against the French. King Sihanouk embarked on his political career by abdicating and founding the *Sangkum Reastr Niyum* movement which won a landslide victory in the 1955 national election. This marked the transfer of political power from the Cambodian Democrats to Prince Sihanouk and the further worsening of Cambodian-Thai relations.

As early as 1954, relations between Cambodia and Thailand had already been strained after Thai troops occupied the ancient Preah Vihear temple. But other domestic and regional factors were also significant in widening this conflict. Sihanouk took political control in Cambodia when Thailand was under right-wing military rule, which acted as a strong U.S. ally against communism in Southeast Asia. Influenced by the likes of China's Chou Enlai and India's Nehru, who advocated neutralist positions in the Cold War conflict, Sihanouk turned down all efforts by the U.S. and its Southeast Asian allies (namely, Thailand and the Philippines) to join the anti-communist blocs (SEATO and ASEAN). In addition, Sihanouk also resented

Thailand's covert support for the Khmer Serei and his other political opponents (such as Sam Sary), which he termed the "Bangkok Plot."

While Prince Sihanouk considered Thailand an irredentist state because of the latter's occupation of the Preah Vihear temple, Thailand's mistrust of Cambodia as a pro-Communist state grew stronger after Cambodia recognized the People's Republic of China in July 1958. Sihanouk's recognition of communist China was a calculated alliance which the prince hoped he could rely on after seeing border incursions from South Vietnam the previous month. Thailand, however, interpreted Cambodia's move as an attempt to intimidate it. In November 1958, Cambodia broke diplomatic relations with Thailand; in response, Thailand recalled its ambassador, closed the border, and suspended air service. Relations deteriorated when Prime Minister Field Marshall Sarit Thanarat took power in Thailand the following year. A staunch anti-communist and distrustful of Sihanouk's neutralist stance, Sarit Thanarat was also perceived by Sihanouk as harboring ambitions to annex Cambodia's territory. The media of both countries exchanged harsh verbal attacks against one another. After years of unresolved disputes over the temple, Cambodia under Prince Sihanouk took the case in 1959 to the International Court of Justice, which ruled on June 15, 1962 in a 9-3 vote that the temple belonged to Cambodia, and ordered Thai troops to leave the temple and its vicinity, as well as to return the temple's relics back to Cambodia.

Throughout the 1960s, relations between the two countries remained strained. While military governments continued to hold power in Thailand and pursued a pro-U.S. foreign policy, Cambodia under Sihanouk was slowly heading toward a crisis by the

end of the decade. Prince Sihanouk alienated the right-wing factions in the country (particularly the military, Sino-Khmer business elites, and the urban youth) through nationalization of the economy and diplomatic breaks from the United States and her regional allies, and later turned against the leftists after sensing the emerging influence of the Chinese Cultural Revolution in Cambodia. In March 1970, Sihanouk was deposed by the right-wing factions in Cambodia led by General Lon Nol and Prince Sirik Matak. The change of regime in Cambodia had a decisive effect of restoring Cambodia-Thailand diplomatic relations.

In May 1970, relations between Cambodia and Thailand and the U.S. once again became cooperative. Notably, the issue of the Preah Vihear conflict never surfaced during this period. As Thai Foreign Minister Thanat Khoman declared, the break in relationships between the countries “was due to one man,” and now that that man [i.e. Sihanouk] was gone, things could return to normal. In October that same year, Cambodia was proclaimed the “Khmer Republic.” Contrary to Sihanouk’s foreign policy, the Khmer Republic pursued pro-Western and anti-Vietnamese-communist policies. Between 1970 and 1973, Thailand provided military support to Cambodia in its war against the local communist Khmer Rouge and the Vietnamese communists in Cambodia by training thousands of raw Cambodian recruits, providing technical advisers, and such logistic support as patrol boats, clothing and equipment kits for some 50,000 soldiers. Even if the Thai government was covertly encouraging their villagers to expand settlements along the border possibly at the expense of Cambodia’s territory, the Khmer Republic was either unaware or unwilling to

challenge Thailand's encroachment, simply because they were too caught up in their battle against both the Khmer Rouge and the North Vietnamese.

Cooperation between the Khmer Republic and Thailand had slowed by late 1973, after student-led mass protests in Bangkok forced the military to retreat from politics and gave way to elected civilian governments, which responded to the people's sentiment of anti-imperialism and their desire to see Thailand remain out of the Vietnam War. From this period on, the Thai government's close collaboration with the U.S. and the Khmer Republic started to encounter major obstacles. Likewise, Lon Nol's government had little sympathy from Thai public opinion at this point. In fact, as early as 1970, the prospect of sending Thai troops into Cambodia had already deeply divided the Thai government and the larger society.

Despite military support from the U.S. and her allies, by early 1975, the Khmer Republic was about to collapse. Many parts of the country were lost to Khmer Rouge control. On April 17, 1975, Phnom Penh was taken over by the communists, and several of the Khmer Republic leaders were executed by the new rulers of Cambodia as soon as they took power. Nonetheless, many others, including a number of Khmer Republic army generals, managed to flee to the Thai border or were flown out of Cambodia to Western countries before the arrival of the Khmer Rouge. These escapees were to become the backbone of the non-communist resistance forces based in Thailand against the Khmer Rouge, and later the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia during the late 1970s and 1980s.

After the Khmer Rouge took power in April 1975, Thailand was quick to recognize the new Cambodian communist government. Thailand's foreign policy at this point did not deviate from Thai public opinion. The Thai military – though anti-communist – in its politically weakened condition, did not officially object to this conciliatory move. Although the Thai civilian government was not pro-communist, it was not anti-communist either, and relations with Democratic Kampuchea were not strained, at least not on governmental levels. Despite the fact that occasional clashes along the border were sometimes caused by local commanders without the knowledge of or approval by the Thai central governments, both countries seemed to express a desire to resolve their border conflicts. Actually, the border clashes between 1975 and 1976 stemmed from occasional attacks into Cambodia by the Khmer right-wing resistance forces (backed by Thai armed forces), resulting in retaliation by Khmer Rouge soldiers and were pushed back into Thai territory, leading to clashes between the Khmer Rouge and the Thai military/border patrols.

In October 1976, the three-year (unstable) democratic experience under a series of civilian governments in Thailand came to an abrupt end, when a coup brought to power a right-wing military government under Thanin Kraivichian. The military had always been an anti-communist power institution in Thailand, both within their state and in the region. It is therefore not surprising that by January 1977, border clashes between the Thai army and the Khmer Rouge occurred again, and more frequently. Many commentators at the time tended to attribute the border clashes between Democratic Kampuchea and Thailand to Pol Pot's irredentist policy, in the same way that it would happen a year later with Vietnam to the east. The border conflicts,

however, occurred in the context of two hostile regimes harboring different interests and ideologies – i.e. between an anti-communist military regime in Thailand and a communist regime in Cambodia, each supporting the dissidents of the other.

Thanin Kraivichian's hardline government further intensified the communist insurgency in Thailand and hurt foreign relations with neighbors in the region, especially with Democratic Kampuchea. By October 1977, a coup by a more moderate faction within the Thai military deposed Thanin Kraivichian from power. The new government under Kriangsak Chomanan was pragmatic which helped to improve Thailand's relations with Cambodia. Meanwhile, Democratic Kampuchea under Pol Pot's leadership began to launch border attacks into Vietnam. Vietnam had been engaging in territorial disputes along the border and on the islands off the Gulf of Thailand with Cambodia since as early as mid-1975. Additionally, Pol Pot also distrusted Vietnam for possibly supporting the Khmer Rouge factions in the East Zone of plotting against him – a self-fulfilling prophecy as many cadres in the East Zone escaped to Vietnam from Pol Pot's purges and sought Vietnam's military support to topple Pol Pot in early 1979. As relations with Vietnam began to deteriorate in 1978, the Khmer Rouge also needed to rekindle their relations with Thailand, who was also receptive to such an approach and who also was concerned about Vietnam's perceived hegemonic expansion, and therefore saw Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge as a strong buffer against Vietnam. The border clashes between Democratic Kampuchea and Thailand eventually ceased as the Khmer Rouge were more heavily engaged in battles against Vietnam.

The Vietnamese-backed Kampuchean United Front for National Salvation (KUFNS) which comprised of former Khmer Rouge cadres from the East Zone and other Cambodian communists who had remained in Vietnam since the early 1970s took over Phnom Penh in January 1979, and the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) was proclaimed afterward, with the support and recognition from only the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, the Soviet Union and the eastern bloc. It was strongly opposed by Thailand, China, the U.S. and ASEAN countries, who condemned Vietnam's actions as a violation of Cambodia's sovereignty. Before the KUFNS and the Vietnamese troops reached Phnom Penh on January 7, 1979, Khmer Rouge leaders barely escaped to the Thai border, and would remain as a major resistance force to the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia during the following decade.

By this time, several factions of Khmer resistance had been formed along the Thai border. They were eventually clustered into three main groups: the remnants of the Khmer Rouge, the Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF; comprising former generals and supporters of the Khmer Republic led by Son Sann), and the royalist FUNCINPEC (under Prince Sihanouk). It should be remembered that these factions had been former enemies. Yet, they shared a common stance: their strong opposition to Vietnam's control over Cambodia. All three factions regarded Vietnam's control of Cambodia a major threat to the latter's existence as a nation-state. Although the Thai military government at this point was not pro-communist, it saw no reason to jeopardize its relationship with the Khmer Rouge, who were militarily still the strongest among the Khmer resistance factions in countering Vietnam's "hegemonic expansion" in Indochina. Furthermore, Thailand also

benefited from serving as the hub for China's military aid and the U.S. financial support to all the resistance forces. It must be pointed out, however, that Thailand's foreign policy during the first half of the 1980s was carried out by the Thai military and bureaucrats, who viewed Vietnam's military presence in Cambodia as a threat to Thai security, but also provided them with opportunities to benefit domestically from the refugee camp economy, foreign aid, and a constant fair share of the national budget.

The Vietnamese-backed People's Republic of Kampuchea unsurprisingly lambasted Thailand for providing shelter and support to the Khmer resistance groups. It denounced Thailand and other states for particularly supporting the Khmer Rouge who had committed atrocities in Cambodia during Democratic Kampuchea rule. Therefore, for the first half of the 1980s, no political solutions between the different factions were in sight. In 1986, however, Vietnam decided to adopt *doi moi* (renovation), ushering in reforms toward a market economy, as well as a relatively more conciliatory foreign policy outlook. This was a consequence of the Soviet Union's (under Mikhail Gorbachev) earlier adoption of *perestroika*. Nevertheless, the Thai military government and the PRK continued to carry out their campaigns against each other along the border.

In 1988, a pro-business democratically-elected civilian government under Chatichai Choonhavan took power in Bangkok after the increasing influence of business circles in Thai society and politics became full-fledged. The new Thai prime minister was widely known for his ambition of turning Indochina "from battlefield to a market

place.” Consequently, relationships between Thailand and Cambodia became less strained as the Thai government invited Prime Minister Hun Sen of Cambodia for an official visit to Bangkok – the first trip of its kind in years. At about the same time, the PRK led by Hun Sen had also begun holding negotiations with Sihanouk. These long series of talks eventually led to the signing of the Paris Peace Agreements in October 1991, with 18 other major powers and countries (including Thailand) as signatories.

The 1991 Paris Peace Agreements culminated in the establishment of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) that was commissioned to keep peace and supervise a national election to be held in mid-1993. UNTAC was also responsible for facilitating the repatriation of some 300,000 Cambodian refugees from the Thai border. According to the Agreements, all factions were required to disarm and join the election in 1993. Because of the mistrust of the Khmer Rouge toward the Cambodian People’s Party (formerly the Kampuchean People’s Revolutionary Party under PRK), they decided to boycott the election and retreated to western parts of the country. The international community was also required to refrain from supporting the different factions. Although Thailand was a signatory of the Paris Peace Agreements, Thai governments during the 1990s did not abide by the agreements’ terms, as they allowed Thai companies to do business directly with the outlawed Khmer Rouge, mainly in logging and gemstone extraction. The Cambodian government at this point probably saw little reason to jeopardize relations over this issue. After all, foreign direct investment and border trade relations with Thailand were much more important economic interests for the Cambodian government.

The political crisis leading to the violent clashes between the two factions in the Cambodian coalition government in July 1997 coincided with the Asian Financial Crisis that had erupted in Bangkok. The political impact of the crisis was the subsequent rise of Thaksin Shinawatra, a Thai business tycoon who has since, for better or worse, transformed much of Thai contemporary politics. Cambodia's relations with Thailand (under Hun Sen and Thaksin, respectively) were by and large amicable, diplomatically and economically. A brief exception to these generally close ties was the anti-Thai riots in early 2003, which disrupted Cambodian-Thai relations for a few months, before they were normalized later that same year. Even after Thaksin was deposed by a military coup in late 2006, Cambodian-Thai diplomatic relations remained cordial as proxy governments of Thaksin retained their usual relationship with Hun Sen's government, and Thaksin continued to privately pursue economic interests in Cambodia even after he was exiled.

Problems erupted in July 2008, after Cambodia successfully enlisted the Preah Vihear temple as a UNESCO's World Heritage Site. Although Cambodia's proposal had been supported by the Thai government under Samak Sundaravej (then a proxy of Thaksin), it was greeted with protests in Thailand by the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) – the so-called “yellow-shirt” Thai royalist ultra-nationalists. The then-opposition Democrat Party fervently took up the temple issue and accused Thaksin and his proxy government of selling off Thai territory and losing sovereignty to Cambodia. Cambodia-Thailand diplomatic relations became more strained after December 2008, when the Democrat Party took power in Thailand following the constitutionally-imposed dissolution of Thaksin's proxy People's Power Party.

Between late 2008 and 2011, Cambodian-Thai diplomatic relations were at their lowest during the post-Cold War era. Exchanges of diplomatic verbal attacks were more the rule than the exception, and deadly military clashes along the border also took place occasionally.

It was only after Pheu Thai Party led by Yingluck Shinawatra (Thaksin's youngest sister) won a landslide victory in Thailand's national election in July 2011 that relations between the two nations returned to their previously cooperative and friendly positions. Soon after her electoral victory, Yingluck reckoned that her government's urgent task would be to restore bilateral relations with neighboring countries, implicitly referring to Cambodia – a stance that was mutually and enthusiastically shared by the Cambodian government. Since late 2011, Cambodian-Thai relations have been more amicable. In addition to the restoration of close diplomatic ties, there has also been a continuing increase in the number of tourists, as well as a higher border trade volume between the two countries. However, the unwillingness of Yingluck's government to fully abide by the recent ICJ's ruling which granted Cambodia's sovereignty over the promontory of the mountain on which the Preah Vihear temple sits serves as a reminder that relations between Cambodia and Thailand cannot proceed completely autonomously by the civilian governments in both countries without taking into account the ongoing domestic crises in Thai politics. The fact that Cambodia has not pushed Yingluck's government to accept the court's ruling and withdraw Thai troops from the area accordingly demonstrates that the Cambodian government well understands the difficult position Yingluck's government is currently in, and that Cambodia is willing to overlook this issue for the

time being for the sake of carrying on friendly relations between the two governments.

This dissertation has attempted to provide a comprehensive empirical discussion of Cambodia-Thailand diplomatic relations since 1950 to the present. Albeit with presumable shortcomings (especially the exclusion of primary sources in Thai language), it is the first attempt to chronicle relations between the two countries in successive regimes during the last six decades. More importantly, however, the research seeks to offer an alternative theoretical framework to the existing mainstream discussions about the changes and continuity of Cambodian-Thai relations. The “social conflict” analysis utilized in this research deviates from mainstream IR theories (such as international balances of power in realism or embedded nationalism and historical animosity in constructivism). These theories cannot fully explain the fluctuations of Cambodia-Thailand diplomatic relations in the period discussed. They do not take into account the competing social forces whose different ideologies and strategic interests prompt them to view threat(s) and security issues differently and pursue foreign policies to advance their domestic power positions accordingly.

From the empirical evidence presented, the following major observations can be made and have been consistently pointed out in all the chapters of this dissertation. Firstly, relations between Cambodia and Thailand since 1950 have not shifted simply as a result of the change of international balances of power or because Thailand as a larger state increased its military spending. In addition, relations between Cambodia and Thailand could also fluctuate even when there was no structural change in the

international balances of power. Instead, domestic politics played a more prominent role. That is, changes of government or regimes in either Cambodia or Thailand tended to have a stronger effect in the shifts of relations between the two countries. Positive relations were the result when there were similar regime types (if they were both civilian and democratically elected governments), shared mutual interests (e.g. in business and other economic ties), and/or mutual security strategies (having common enemies internally or externally). Conversely, the change of government or regime in either Cambodia or Thailand usually resulted in strained relations if the new government did not share any similar regime type, ideology, and/or mutual strategic interest with the government of the other state, but rather shared more in common with the dissidents of that government. This observation holds true for both Cold War and post-Cold war periods.

Secondly, we must recognize that though a certain degree of nationalistic antagonism produced through historical narratives and discourses does exist between Cambodia and Thailand, it only becomes a factor affecting the two countries' relations when the Cambodian and/or Thai political elites need to bolster legitimacy at home. Yet, leaders in either country have not always done so simply whenever they faced a domestic legitimacy crisis. A major factor in pushing for invocation of nationalism and conflict has generally been, as mentioned in the previous points, when the two governments do not share similar ideologies and/or core mutual strategic interests, which would have made it easier for politicized nationalism to arise.

7.2. Implications for future relations

What then, are the implications for future Cambodian-Thai diplomatic relations? At the time of this writing, although Yingluck is facing major ongoing protests (especially in Bangkok), her government has not yet invoked nationalism or intentionally encouraged hostility with the current Cambodian government, since the mutual interests between the two now trump any possible benefits out of a diverted external conflict. Still, the fact that Yingluck's government cannot act totally independently from the military's oversight implies that sensitive issues related to Cambodia (such as signing border agreements) will unlikely be on the agenda of the two states' meetings in the foreseeable future. Given the long history of the Thai military's meddling in Thai politics, however, a military coup cannot be completely ruled out. The army has thus far been reluctant to interfere in the political feuds between Yingluck's government and the anti-government protesters given the recent experience of major backlashes by Thaksin's supporters. Yet, should the present situation escalate further, and more importantly, if Yingluck's government faces increasing dissension from her own supporters because of her administration's failure to carry out her party's populist policies (such as the much-criticized wasteful rice purchase schemes), the military would see justification for stepping in. And as Cambodia is a natural neighbor of Thailand, the border conflict between the two countries might not be forever spared, especially insofar as the Thai army is still a major political institution in Thai politics.

In the very long run, enmity between the two countries can be reduced if peace studies and objective history are implemented with goodwill in the education systems of both countries, so that future politicians have no pretext to invoke nationalism to serve domestic interests. In the shorter and more immediate run, however, good relations can most likely be sustained only if both regimes in Cambodia and Thailand are led by autonomous civilian governments (that is, not under military influence) and are popularly elected democracies. Such governments need no invocation of nationalist sentiment to bolster their domestic legitimacy since they can retain their political leadership through maintaining peace and stability, as well as by pursuing stronger bilateral economic ties. The fact that the planned integration of an ASEAN Economic Community (2015) is under way, albeit not without hurdles, should give us some hope that positive relations between Cambodia and Thailand and within the region may likely prevail.

LIST OF APPENDICES

- 1. APPENDIX 1: MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT OF THE KINGDOM OF THAILAND AND THE GOVERNMENT OF THE KINGDOM OF CAMBODIA ON THE SURVEY AND DEMARCATION OF LAND BOUNDARY**
- 2. APPENDIX 2: MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN THE ROYAL THAI GOVERNMENT AND THE ROYAL GOVERNMENT OF CAMBODIA REGARDING THE AREA OF THEIR OVERLAPPING MARITIME CLAIMS TO THE CONTINENTAL SHELF**
- 3. APPENDIX 3: MAP OF OVERLAPPING CLAIMS AREA**
- 4. APPENDIX 4: JOINT COMMUNIQUE, 18 JUNE 2008**
- 5. APPENDIX 5: DIPUTED AREA ALONG THE DANGREK MOUNTAIN RANGE**

APPENDIX 1

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT OF THE KINGDOM OF THAILAND AND THE GOVERNMENT OF THE KINGDOM OF CAMBODIA ON THE SURVEY AND DEMARCATION OF LAND BOUNDARY

THE GOVERNMENT OF THE KINGDOM OF THAILAND AND THE GOVERNMENT OF THE KINGDOM OF CAMBODIA;

Desiring to further strengthen the existing bonds of friendship between the two countries;

Believing that the demarcation of land boundary between the Kingdom of Thailand and the Kingdom of Cambodia will help prevent border conflicts arising out of boundary questions and will further strengthen existing friendly relations between the two countries and facilitate the travel and cooperation of the peoples along the border;

Recalling the Joint Communiqué of the Prime Ministers of the Kingdom of Thailand and the Kingdom of Cambodia, dated 13 January 1994, in which it was agreed to establish the Thai-Cambodian Joint Committee on Boundary in due course;

Recalling also the Joint Statement on the Establishment of the Thai-Cambodian Joint Commission on Demarcation for Land Boundary, dated 21 June 1997, in which it was agreed to establish the Thai-Cambodian Joint Commission on Demarcation for Land Boundary, entrusted with the task of placing markers in order to indicate the land boundary between the two countries;

HAVE AGREED AS FOLLOWS:

Article I

The survey and demarcation of land boundary between the Kingdom of Thailand and the Kingdom of Cambodia shall be jointly conducted in accordance with the following documents:

- (a) Convention between Siam and France modifying the Stipulations or the Treaty of the 3 October 1893, regarding Territorial Boundaries and other Arrangements, signed at Paris, 13 February 1904 (Le Convention entre le Siam et la France modifiant les stipulations du Traité du 3 Octobre 1893 concernant les territoires et les autres Arrangements, signée a Paris, le 13 février 1904);
- (b) Treaty between His Majesty the King of Siam and the President of the French Republic, signed at Bangkok, 23 March 1907 (Le Traité entre Sa

Majesté le Roi de Siam at Monsieur le Président de la République Française, signé à Bangkok, le 23 mars 1907) and Protocol concerning the delimitation of boundaries and annexed to the Treaty of the 23 March 1907 (le Protocol concernant la délimitation des frontières et annexé au Traité du 23 mars 1907); and

- (c) Maps which are the results of demarcation works of the Commissions of Delimitation of the Boundary between Indo-China and Siam (Commissions de Délimitation de la Frontière entre Indo-Chine et le Siam) set up under the Convention 1904 and the Treaty of 1907 between Siam and France, and other documents relating to the application of the Convention of 1904 and the Treaty of 1907 between Siam and France.

Article II

1. There shall be a Thai-Cambodian Joint Commission on Demarcation for Land Boundary, hereinafter referred to as “the Joint Boundary Commission”, consisting of two Co-Chairmen and other members appointed by their respective Governments. The Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand and the Adviser to the Royal Government in charge of State Border Affairs of the Kingdom of Cambodia shall be the Co-Chairmen. Appointments of other members shall be communicated between the two Governments within one month after the entry into force of this Memorandum of Understanding.
2. The Joint Boundary Commission shall hold its meeting once a year alternately in Thailand and Cambodia. If necessary, the Joint Boundary Commission may hold a special meeting to discuss urgent matters within its purview.
3. The terms of reference of the Joint Boundary Commission shall be as follows:
 - (a) to be responsible for the joint survey and demarcation of land boundary or accordance with Article I;
 - (b) to consider and approve the terms of reference and master plan for the joint survey and demarcation;
 - (c) to determine the priority of areas to be surveyed and demarcated;
 - (d) to assign the survey and demarcation works to the Joint Technical Sub-Commission as referred to in Article III to supervise and monitor the implementation of the assignment;
 - (e) to consider reports or recommendations submitted by the Joint Technical Sub-Commission;
 - (f) to produce maps of the surveyed and demarcated land boundary; and
 - (g) to appoint any sub-commission to undertake any particular task within its purview.

Article III

1. There shall be a Joint Technical Sub-Commission consisting of two Co-Chairmen and other members to be appointed by the respective Co-Chairmen of the Joint Boundary Commission.
2. The terms of reference of the Joint Technical Sub-Commission shall be as follows:
 - (a) to identify the exact location of the 73 boundary pillars set up by the Commissions of Delimitation of the Boundary between Indo-China and Siam (Commissions de Délimitation de la Frontiere entre l'Indo-Chine et le Siam) in the period of 1909 and 1919, and to report its findings to the Joint Boundary Commission for its consideration;
 - (b) to prepare the terms of reference and master plan for the joint survey and demarcation of land boundary,
 - (c) to appoint joint survey teams to carry out the survey and demarcation of land boundary as assigned by the Joint Boundary Commission;
 - (d) to submit reports or recommendations on the survey and demarcation works to the Joint Boundary Commission;
 - (e) to prepare maps of the surveyed and demarcated land boundary;
 - (f) to designate if necessary authorized representative to supervise the field works on behalf of the Co-Chairmen of the Joint Technical Sub-Commission; and
 - (g) to appoint any technical working group to assist in any particular task within its purview.
3. In carrying out the survey and demarcation works in any area, the joint survey team shall first be assured of its safety from landmines.

Article IV

1. For the purpose of survey and demarcation works, the entire stretch of the common land boundary shall be divided into sectors to be agreed upon by the Joint Technical Sub-Commission.
2. On completion of the survey and demarcation of each sector, a Memorandum of Understanding shall be signed by the Co-Chairmen of the Joint Boundary Commission. A map showing the completed sector shall also be signed and attached to the said Memorandum of Understanding.

Article V

To facilitate the effective survey along the entire stretch of the common land boundary, authorities of either Government and their agents shall not carry out any work resulting in changes of environment of the frontier zone, except that

which is carried out by the Joint Technical Sub-Commission in the interest of the survey and demarcation.

Article VI

1. Each Government shall be responsible for its own expenses for the survey and demarcation works.
2. The costs of materials for the boundary pillars or markers and the preparation and production of maps of the surveyed and demarcated land boundary shall be borne equally by both Governments.

Article VII

1. Both Governments shall make the necessary arrangements regarding immigration, quarantine and customs clearance to facilitate the execution of the survey and demarcation works.
2. In particular, the equipment, materials and supplies, in reasonable quantities and for the exclusive use of the joint survey teams in the survey and demarcation of the land boundary, although brought across the border, shall not be considered as exports from one country or imports into another country and shall not be liable to customs duties or taxes pertaining to export or import of goods.

Article VIII

Any dispute arising out of the interpretation or application of this Memorandum of Understanding shall be settled peacefully by consultation and negotiation.

Article IX

This Memorandum of Understanding shall enter into force on the date of its signature by the duly authorized representatives of the Government of the Kingdom of Thailand and the Government of the Kingdom of Cambodia.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the undersigned, being duly authorized thereto by their respective Governments, have signed this Memorandum of Understanding.

DONE in duplicate at Phnom Penh on 14 June 2000 in the Thai, Khmer and English languages, all texts being equally authentic.

In case of any divergence of interpretation, the English text shall prevail.

FOR THE GOVERNMENT OF
THE KINGDOM OF CAMBODIA

FOR THE GOVERNMENT OF
THE KINGDOM OF THAILAND

Var Kim Hong
Adviser to the Royal Government
in charge of State Border Affairs
of the Kingdom of Cambodia

M.R. Sukhumbhand Paribatra
Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs
of the Kingdom Thailand

APPENDIX 2

**MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING
BETWEEN
THE ROYAL THAI GOVERNMENT
AND THE ROYAL GOVERNMENT OF CAMBODIA
REGARDING
THE AREA OF THEIR OVERLAPPING MARITIME CLAIMS
TO THE CONTINENTAL SHELF**

The Royal Thai Government and the Royal Government of Cambodia (hereinafter referred to as the Parties):

DESIRING to strengthen further the existing bonds of traditional friendship between the two countries;

RECOGNIZING that as a result of claims made by the two countries to territorial sea, continental shelf and exclusive economic zone in the Gulf of Thailand, there exists an area of overlapping claims (the *Overlapping Claims Area*);

CONSIDERING that it is in the best interest of the two countries to agree upon an early mutually acceptable basis for exploitation of the hydrocarbon resources of the Overlapping Claims Area as soon as possible; and

TAKING NOTE of the understanding reached between their respective senior officials as reflected in the Agreed Minutes of the Informal Consultations done at Cha Am on 4 October 2000 and at Siem Reap on 21 April 2001:

HAVE AGREED AS FOLLOWS:

1. The Parties consider that it is desirable to enter into provisional arrangements of a practical nature in respect of the Overlapping Claims Area
2. It is the intent of the Parties, through accelerated negotiation, to simultaneously:
 - (a) conclude an agreement for the joint development of the hydrocarbon resources located within the area shown in the Attachment as the Joint Development Area (the *Joint Development Treaty*); and
 - (b) agree upon a mutually acceptable delimitation of the territorial sea, continental shelf and exclusive economic zone in the area shown in the Attachment as the Area to be Delimited.

It is firmly the intent of the Parties to treat the provisions of paragraphs (a) and (b) above as an indivisible package.

3. For the purpose of Article 2, there shall be established a Joint Technical Committee, comprising officials of Thailand and Cambodia to be separately nominated. The Joint Technical Committee shall be responsible for drawing up:
 - (a) the agreed terms of the Joint Development Treaty, including a mutually acceptable basis for sharing the costs and benefits of the exploitation of hydrocarbon resources located in the Joint Development Area; and
 - (b) an agreed delimitation of the territorial sea, continental shelf and exclusive economic zone between their respective current claims in the Area to be Delimited in accordance with applicable principles of international law.
4. The Joint Technical Committee shall meet regularly with a view to concluding its work in relation to these matters expeditiously. The Joint Technical Committee may establish such sub-committees as it considers appropriate.
5. Subject to entry into force of the delimitation of the Parties' respective maritime claims in the Area to be Delimited, this Memorandum of Understanding and all actions taken pursuant to this Memorandum of Understanding are without prejudice to the maritime claims of either party.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the undersigned being duly authorized by their respective Governments, have signed the Present Memorandum of Understanding.

DONE in duplicate in Phnom Penh, on 18 June 2001, in English language.

**FOR THE ROYAL THAI
GOVERNMENT**

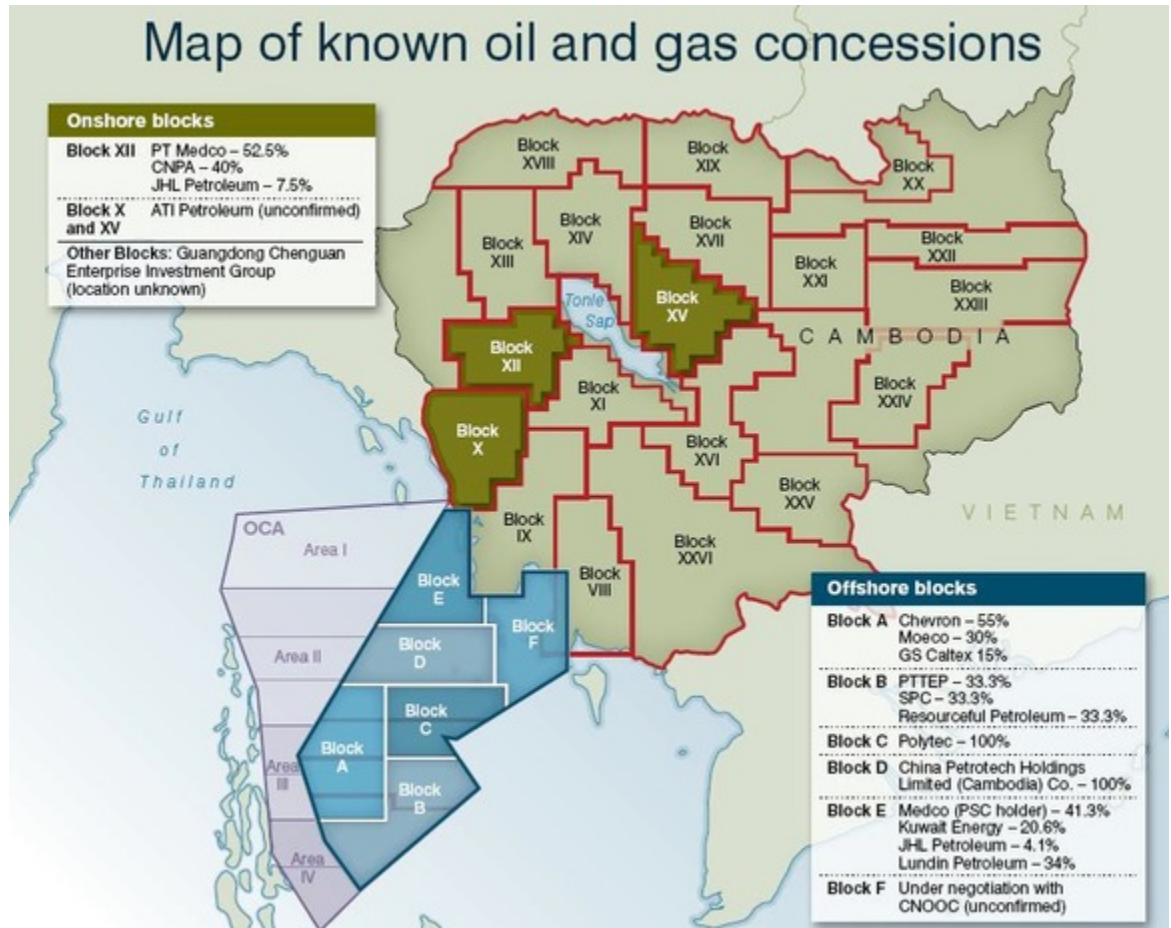
(Surakiart Sathirathai)
Minister of Foreign Affairs of
the Kingdom of Thailand

**FOR THE ROYAL GOVERNMENT
OF CAMBODIA**

(Sok An)
Senior Minister
Chairman of the Cambodian National
Petroleum Authority

APPENDIX 3

MAP OF OVERLAPPING CLAIMS AREA



According to data from Open Development Cambodia:

Cambodia's oil and gas exploration blocks

Cambodian territory is divided into six Offshore Blocks (A to F) and nineteen Onshore Blocks (I to XIX).

Offshore Blocks

All offshore blocks are currently at various stages of exploration. Block A is the most advanced, whereas B-F are still in the early stages of exploration:

- **Block A:** Covering 6,278 km, awarded to Chevron Overseas Petroleum (Cambodia) and Moeco Cambodia in 2002. The operator is Chevron, who announced in 2005 that oil had been found in four wells and gas in one, commercial discoveries were

announced in 2010. The Cambodian government has stated that it hopes to commence production in 2012.

- **Block B:** Awarded in 2005 to PTT Exploration and Production, Singapore Petroleum and Resourceful Petroleum, and covering 6,551km². The operator is PTTEP, which has drilled one exploration well so far, with a second still pending. Findings so far have only revealed non-recoverable oil deposits.
- **Block C:** Licensed to Polytec Petroleum Hong Kong. The company is at the stage of acquiring seismic data.
- **Block D:** Covering 5,506km², granted to China Petrotech Holdings. Recoverable hydrocarbon resources are yet to record, while plans are underway for an exploration well.
- **Block E:** Licensed to Medco Energi, Kuwait Energy and JHL Petroleum – Medco is the operator. Plans are underway for an exploration well within the 5,559km² block.
- **Block F:** Granted to Chinese National Offshore Oil Corporation – At the stage of acquiring seismic data.

Overlapping Claims Area (OCA)

There are also a number of blocks located in the overlapping claims area (OCA) between Cambodia and Thailand, which measures 27,000km², and has been estimated as containing up to 11 trillion cubic feet of natural gas and an undetermined quantity of oil. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed between the two countries in 2001, which set a joint-development regime over certain areas of the OCA, and attempted to define a maritime border between others. Negotiations were disrupted by the change in Thai leadership in 2006, and in 2009 the MOU was suspended by Thailand. However, hopes have been expressed that an agreement is closer to being reached since the re-election of the Pheu Thai Party in Thailand. Despite this uncertainty, a number of companies have expressed an interest in exploration in the OCA, and subject to resolution of the claims, Cambodia has granted conditional licenses to **Idemitsu** and **Conocco Phillips** for Areas I and II, and **Total** for Area III.

(Source: <http://www.opendevelopmentcambodia.net/briefing/oil-and-gas-blocks/>)

APPENDIX 4

JOINT COMMUNIQUE, 18 JUNE 2008

On 22 May 2008, a meeting took place between H.E. Mr. Sok An, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister in charge of the Office of the Council of Ministers of the Kingdom of Cambodia and H.E. Mr. Noppadon Pattama, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the kingdom of Thailand, to continue their discussion regarding the inscription of the Temple of Preah Vihear on the World Heritage List. The meeting was held at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris in the presence of Mrs. Françoise Rivière, Assistant Director-General for Culture of UNESCO, Ambassador Francesco Caruso, Mr. Azedine Beschaouch, Mrs. Paola Leoncini Bartoli and Mr. Giovanni Boccardi.

The meeting was held in a spirit of friendship and cooperation.

During the meeting both sides agreed as follows:

1. The Kingdom of Thailand supports the inscription, at the 32nd session of the World Heritage Committee (Québec, Canada, July 2008), of the Temple of Preah Vihear on the World Heritage List proposed by the Kingdom of Cambodia, the perimeter of which is identified as N. 1 in the map prepared by the Cambodian authorities and herewith attached. The map also includes, identified as N.2, a buffer zone to the East and South of the Temple.
2. In the spirit of goodwill and conciliation, the Kingdom of Cambodia accepts that the Temple of Preah Vihear be nominated for inscription on the World Heritage List without at this stage a buffer zone on the northern and western areas of the Temple.
3. The map mentioned in paragraph 1 above shall supersede the maps concerning and including the “Schéma Directeur pour le Zonage de Preah Vihear” as well as all the graphic references indicating the “core zone” and other zoning (zonage) of the Temple of Preah Vihear site in Cambodia's nomination file;
4. Pending the results of the work of the Joint Commission for Land Boundary (JBC) concerning the northern and western areas surrounding the Temple of Preah Vihear, which are identified as N. 3 in the map mentioned in paragraph 1 above, the management plan of these areas will be prepared in a concerted manner between the Cambodian and Thai authorities in conformity with the international conservation standards with a view to maintain the outstanding universal value of the property. Such management plan will be included in the final management plan for the Temple and its surrounding areas to be submitted to the World Heritage Centre by 1st February 2010 for the consideration of the World Heritage Committee at its 34th session in 2010;
5. The inscription of the Temple of Preah Vihear on the World Heritage list shall be without prejudice to the rights of the Kingdom of Cambodia and the

Kingdom of Thailand on the demarcation works of the Joint Commission for Land Boundary (JBC) of the two countries;

6. The Kingdom of Cambodia and the Kingdom of Thailand express their profound appreciation to the Director-General of UNESCO, H.E. Mr. Koïchiro Matsuura, for his kind assistance in facilitating the process towards the inscription of the Temple of Preah Vihear on the World Heritage List.

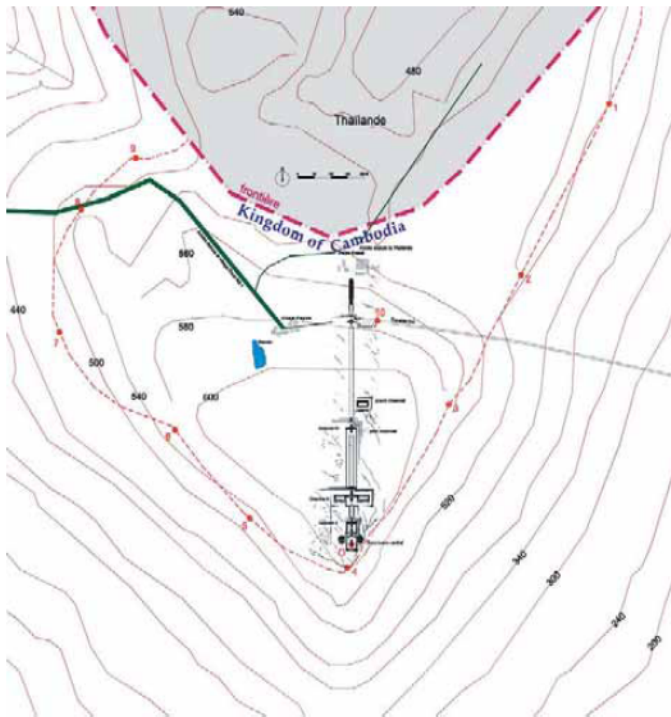
Phnom Penh, 18 June 2008
For the Royal Government
of Cambodia,
H.E. Mr. SOK AN
Deputy Prime Minister,
Minister in charge of the Office
of the Council of Ministers

Bangkok, 18 June 2008
For the Government of the Kingdom
of Thailand,
H.E. Mr. NOPPADON PATTAMA
Minister of Foreign Affairs

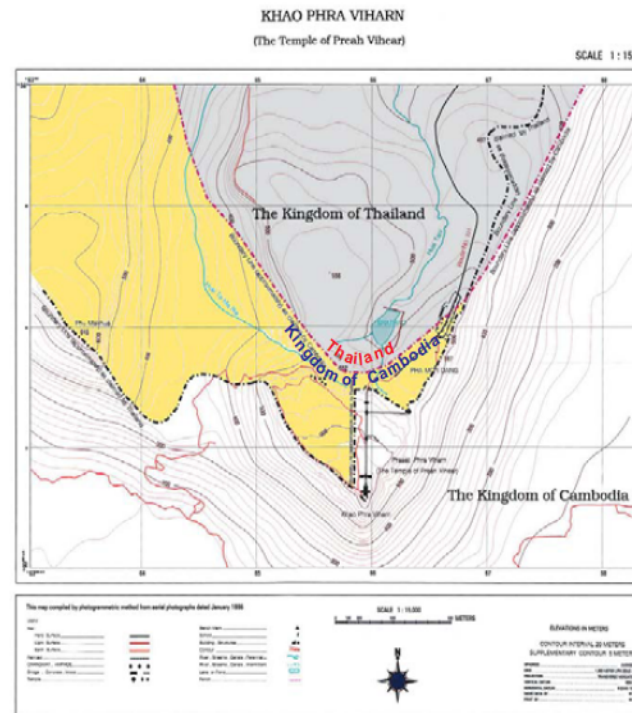
Paris, 18 June 2008
Representative of the UNESCO
Françoise Rivière
Assistant Director-General for Culture

APPENDIX 5

DISPUTED AREA ALONG THE DANGREK MOUNTAIN RANGE



Map used by the Kingdom of Cambodia based on the Map recognized by the ICJ as **an integral part** of the treaty settlement in its judgment of 15 June 1962



Recent map for the same area **unilaterally** prepared and presented by Kingdom of Thailand in Christchurch, NZ during the 31st session of the V (2007). The yellow colored area indicates the claim by Thailand.

(Source: Office of the Council of Ministers, Kingdom of Cambodia, *The Temple of Preah Vihear: Inscribed on the World Heritage List (UNESCO) since 2008*, p. 8.)

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