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Historical Security Council of 1978

The question of Cambodia



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Forum:	Historical Security Council of 1978
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Introduction

Note: this entire research report, except for where it is specified, has been written in the context of 1978.

In 1970, Prince Sihanouk of Cambodia was overthrown by General Lon Nol in a right-wing coup. As a result, Sihanouk aligned instead with the Khmer Rouge, the name given to the members of the Communist Party of Kampuchea in Cambodia.

During the Vietnam War, the Communist Viet Cong was being sheltered in parts of Cambodia. These remaining forces were driven out by the Lon Nol government. This all sparked a civil war between the Khmer Rouge and the Lon Nol government. In 1975, the Lon Nol government surrendered to the Khmer Rouge, whose leader at this point was Pol Pot. Khmer Rouge entered Phnom Penh and took the rest of the country that year, and made Sihanouk head of state once again. The civil war was now over. To mark a new beginning for Cambodia, the Khmer Rouge coined the phrase 'Year Zero'.

The next year, Cambodia was renamed Democratic Kampuchea. Sihanouk resigned and Pol Pot became prime minister. The United States had launched carpet bombing campaigns in Cambodia against the Khmer Rouge from 1969-1973. This was propagandized by the Khmer Rouge, and they have used the possibility of the bombings happening again in the cities to justify a forced mass migration from the cities to the country side. The idea behind this is creating an agrarian Communist society in Democratic Kampuchea. Peasants are glorified, but at the same time a famine has been taking place to which many Cambodians have lost their lives.

In addition to this, many of the educated population (New People) as well as ethnic enemies of the Cambodians (Muslims, Chinese, Thais, Christians, etc.) are reported to have

been killed – in other words, all those who opposed the new regime. Recent estimates of the victims are numbers between several hundred thousand and two million.

In 1977, fighting between Vietnam and Democratic Kampuchea began.

For the purpose of debate, only events until the 1st of December 1978 will be discussed in order to draft a resolution. Please keep in mind that debate will be limited to the knowledge of the events in Cambodia which the international community had access to in 1978, as it also takes place in 1978! See Appendix 3.

A note to delegates: instead of using solutions actually implemented to resolve the question of Cambodia, please consider possible solutions, which may improve what actually happened in history. (Consider lack of UN intervention; see Possible Solutions)

Definition of Key Terms

Genocide

Article II from the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide states:

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

- a) Killing members of the group;
- b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.”¹

Year Zero

This is a term coined by the Khmer Rouge which applied to 1975; it implies a new beginning for Cambodia starting from the very beginning. ‘Year Zero’ refers to Year One of the French Revolutionary Calendar.

¹ "The International Legal Definition of Genocide." *Prevent Genocide International*. N.p., n.d. Web. 12 July 2016. <<http://www.preventgenocide.org/genocide/officialtext-printerfriendly.htm>>



Khmer Rouge

Those who were members of the Communist Party of Kampuchea in Cambodia. The name originates from Khmer: the language and ethnicity of (the greater proportion) the Cambodian people. Prior to the existence of modern Cambodia, there was the Khmer Empire.

Crimes against humanity

Crimes against humanity are defined in the Nuremberg Charter in article 6(c) as:

“Crimes against humanity: murder, extermination, enslavement, deportation, and other inhumane acts committed against civilian populations, before or during the war; or persecutions on political, racial or religious grounds in execution of or in connection with any crime within the jurisdiction of the Tribunal, whether or not in violation of the domestic law of the country where perpetrated.”²

War crimes

War crimes are defined by the Fourth Geneva Convention in Article 147 as:

"Wilful killing, torture or inhuman treatment, including... wilfully causing great suffering or serious injury to body or health, unlawful deportation or transfer or unlawful confinement of a protected person, compelling a protected person to serve in the forces of a hostile power, or wilfully depriving a protected person of the rights of fair and regular trial, ...taking of hostages and extensive destruction and appropriation of property, not justified by military necessity and carried out unlawfully and wantonly."³

Guerrilla warfare

Guerrilla warfare usually refers to military action which is irregular and carried out in smaller groups instead of a larger force. Hit-and-run tactics, which involve an attack and immediate departure from the area, are often used.

² "Charter of the International Military Tribunal." *The Avalon Project*. Yale University, n.d. Web. 12 July 2016. <<http://avalon.law.yale.edu/imt/imtconst.asp>>.

³ Kafala, Tarik. "What Is a War Crime?" *BBC News*. BBC, 21 Oct. 2009. Web. 12 July 2016. <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/1420133.stm>>



General Overview



Figure 1: A map of Cambodia which illustrates bordering nations and provinces in 1978. Note in particular the Cambodian-Vietnamese border.⁴

Cambodia's colonial past

French explorers arrived in Cambodia in the 1860s. Believing Cambodia could be a gateway to China, they declared a protectorate. In addition, occupying Cambodia as well as Southern Vietnam, which they already did, was tempting. Although officially a protectorate under France, Cambodia was essentially a colony – there was extensive French political and economic control.

The country was not prepared for independence; there were not many educational or political opportunities for the Cambodian people. In fact, the only educational institution in Cambodia was a single high school. Likewise, there was no effective legal system in place.

⁴ Cambodia. Digital image. Wikimedia. Wikipedia, n.d. Web. 12 July 2016. <<https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/f/fb/Un-cambodia.png>>.

This set the stage for communism to develop, in response to French colonialism and inspired by neighbouring country Vietnam's events.

In 1940, Cambodia was occupied by Japan. Japan allowed the French to maintain their authority, but encouraged nationalism throughout the country. During this time, the French chose the 19-year-old Norodom Sihanouk to rule, believing he would be able to be controlled. When the war ended, France and Vietnam began a war of attrition following Ho Chi Minh's declaration of a new Vietnamese state in 1945. This conflict left France unable to suppress the independence movement in Cambodia; in 1949, Cambodia was granted autonomy (leaving French control over the military and economy) and in 1953, Cambodia declared independence from France. King Sihanouk abdicated his throne, leaving him with the title Prince, and won the election to become head of state. Cambodia's name was changed from the French Cambodge to Kampuchea.

Vietnam War and Cambodian Civil War

Cambodia's foreign policy from 1953 onward included remaining neutral during the Vietnam War. Officially, the Viet Minh forces were banned from entering Cambodia. However, Sihanouk admitted in 1968 that Cambodia had been supplying the Viet Cong as well as sheltering them.

The United States then began a bombing campaign against the NVA, targeting their supply lines along the border (see Figure 1 above). Cambodian cities were carpet-bombed, killing thousands of civilians.

At the same time, Sihanouk was also trying to rid Cambodia of communism and created a list called the "34 subversives", which included people such as Pol Pot. These people were also referred to as the "Khmer Rouges", or "the Red Khmers". This would eventually be the name for the Communist Party in Kampuchea, but without the 's' due to the pronunciation in English. Many of the members of the Communist Party fled to eastern Cambodia.

In March 1970, the prime minister and General Lon Nol, executed a military coup against Sihanouk against the harbouring of Viet Cong in Cambodia. Sihanouk happened to be abroad during this coup, and Lon Nol became the new head of state and allied his government with the United States.

By 1974, 600,000 civilians had been killed either due to the American carpet bombings or due to fighting between the Lon Nol government and the Khmer Rouge.⁵

Rise of the Khmer Rouge and its ideology

The Cambodian communist movement emerged during French colonization, and was heavily influenced by the Vietnamese situation. During the suppression of communism, the movement grew. The American carpet bombings also caused great anger and thus increased Khmer Rouge membership, as they were the main opposition of the American-allied Lon Nol government.

The leader of the Khmer Rouge was Pol Pot, who was educated in France after winning a scholarship to study in Paris in 1949. It was here that he immersed himself in communism. He became one of the leaders of the Khmer Rouge after returning to Cambodia in 1953. A decade later, guerrilla bases were set up to resist suppression by Sihanouk's government.

The rest of this sub-section is written outside of the context of 1978:

The ideology of Khmer Rouge was quite unique. It was a combination of Maoism and Marxism-Leninism, which had the aim of creating a classless society. Like Mao, the 'old people', the peasants, were glorified, while the 'new people', the educated population were persecuted. All forms of capitalism would be removed; the Khmer Rouge sought to 'purify Cambodia'

Starting in 1975, the Khmer Rouge ordered familial and religious ties to be broken; children were taken away from their families, put in labour camps, and re-educated to believe the State was their only and true parent. In addition, children were taught that non-conformers to the Khmer laws were enemies.

⁵ H, Sydney. "Will Ford Follow Nixon in Support of the Lon Nol Regime." *New York Times*. N.p., 8 Sept. 1974. Web. 12 July 2016. <http://www.nytimes.com/1974/09/08/archives/cambodias-little-war-600000-casualties-will-ford-follow-nixon-in.html?_r=0>.



Political and civil rights were abolished, religion was banned, the currency was abolished, and all aspects of people's lives were subject to control. Cambodians could not even choose their own partners, or what they would wear.

The Khmer Rouge also reset the calendar to "Year Zero". This marked the beginning of the Cambodian 'purification process'.

Khmer Rouge in power

This sub-section is written outside of the context of 1978; while delegates must keep in mind that very little was known about the situation in Cambodia in 1978, in order to formulate solutions, it is necessary to use the value of hindsight:

One of the first actions the Khmer Rouge took once in power was to forcibly deport millions from the cities, such as Cambodian capital Phnom Penh (see Figure 1), into the countryside. This action killed thousands in itself. The goal of this was to begin the transformation of Cambodia into a classless, peasant society. As stated above, all forms of capitalism including currency, normal education, private property, religion, transportation, non-revolutionary entertainment and the Khmer culture were abolished. Likewise, educational institutions, religious buildings, government buildings and shops were shut down or made into prisons.

Basic rights such as holding discussions, gathering, etc., were abolished as well. The leaders, who called themselves Angkar Padevat, asked the Cambodians to see them as their true parents.

Furthermore, a cleansing, partly ethnic, took place. Those who were not 'pure' enough to further the revolution, such as city residents, intellectuals, ethnic minorities such as Thai, Vietnamese and Chinese, were seen as traitors. Many were held in prisons, and questioned or tortured – they were then executed. The Cambodian Genocide is called a genocide for this reason: it fulfils the Geneva Convention definition as the killings targeted the educated population, city residents, and ethnic minorities.



It is estimated that between over 1.7 million people were killed by the Khmer Rouge regime.⁶

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

United States of America

In 1969, the USA began carpet bombing Cambodia (this was a covert operation on President Nixon's initiative, as the USA was meant to be targeting only Vietnam), mainly along the Ho Chi Minh trail against the NVA and Viet Cong, who were being sheltered in parts of Cambodia. However, many Cambodian civilians were killed as a result of these bombings. The bombings were used by the Khmer Rouge as propaganda to increase membership, but also to force migration to the countryside by using the prospect of another bombing campaign in the cities. In 1970, the United States and South Vietnam invaded Cambodia, targeting both the NVA and the Viet Cong supply lines.

France

France had colonised Cambodia in 1863 and only withdrew in 1954. Their sudden absence of administration left Cambodia politically vulnerable from 1955 onward.

Vietnam

During the Vietnam War, the Ho Chi Minh trail ran through Cambodia and Laos. This was attacked by South Vietnam as well as the United States. Cambodia sheltered North Vietnamese troops during the war as well. Later on, as Democratic Kampuchea considered the Vietnamese to be the ethnic enemies of the Khmers, fighting began in 1977. With a brief withdrawal in January 1978, skirmishes between Vietnam and Cambodia have taken place throughout the past year. Currently, Vietnamese troops have still been spotted in Cambodia.

Soviet Union

Security Council initiatives to intervene in Cambodia were not taken due to paralysation due to likelihood of veto use by the USSR.

⁶ "Introduction to the ECCC." *Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia*. ECCC, n.d. Web. 12 July 2016. <<https://www.eccc.gov.kh/en/about-eccc/introduction>>.



Khmer Rouge

The Khmer Rouge took power in 1975 and reports of severe human rights violations, including torture, mass killings, persecution of minorities and the education population, among other atrocities, have been released. The leader of the Khmer Rouge is Pol Pot.

Timeline of Events

Date	Event	
1863	Cambodia becomes a French protectorate.	
1941	During World War II, Cambodia is occupied by Japan.	
1945	The Japanese occupation comes to an end.	
1950	Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia become part of a French Union as independent states.	
1953	Cambodia becomes independent from France, as the Kingdom of Cambodia with King Sihanouk as its leader.	
1954	France confirms that it has withdrawn from Cambodia at the Geneva Conference. SEATO (Southeast Asia Treaty Organization) is created to stop the spread of communism in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos.	
1955	King Sihanouk hands the throne over to his father in order to become prime minister.	
1960	Sihanouk becomes king once again, following his father's death. Repression of the Communist party begins.	
1965	Sihanouk breaks off ties with the United States.	
1967	Pol Pot's Communist group, named 'Khmer Rouge' by Sihanouk, begins taking up arms.	
1968	January 9	Cambodia accuses the United States and South Vietnam of crossing the border and killing three Cambodian citizens.
	October 4	Cambodia admits that they have been sheltering the Viet Cong for three years.
1969	May 10	The New York Times reveals the United States has been secretly launching bombing campaigns on Cambodia. (This ends in 1973) There is a movement from the countryside to the cities.



1970	March 18	Prince Sihanouk is overthrown by General Lon Nol in a right-wing coup. The new government is backed by the US. Sihanouk aligns with the Khmer Rouge. The army is sent to fight the North Vietnamese and drive them out. A civil war begins between the Lon Nol government and the Khmer Rouge.
	April 28	The United States invades Cambodia, together with the South Vietnamese. They target North Vietnamese and Viet Cong supply lines, the Ho Chi Minh trail.
	October 9	The Khmer Republic is declared.
1975	April 17	The Lon Nol government surrenders to the Khmer Rouge, led by Pol Pot, and Phnom Penh is occupied. Sihanouk is made head of state. The civil war ends.
1976	Cambodia is renamed Democratic Kampuchea. Sihanouk resigns; Pol Pot becomes prime minister and Khieu Samphan becomes the new head of state.	
1977	Fighting between Cambodia and Vietnam begins.	
1978	May 25	Pol Pot purges the Khmer Rouge, focusing on the East Zone.

UN Involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

In 1978, a report was brought before the United Nations Commission on Human Rights Sub-commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities by Australia, the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada and Norway. It included information on human rights violations by the Khmer Rouge regime and testimonies and documentation, mainly from refugees. This was the first mention of the Cambodian question in the United Nations, and the report has not been considered or voted upon yet. It is estimated that anywhere between hundreds of thousands and two million may have been killed.

Due to the number of the estimated killings, delegates may be interested in reading the following UN Convention on Genocide. (See Appendix 2) Cambodia has ratified this convention



Possible Solutions

The rule of the Khmer Rouge is still ongoing; the Security Council must consider how the conflict will be brought to a close (the country has been fighting with Vietnam since 1977) and what actions will be taken in order to bring to justice those who have possibly committed crimes against humanity, etc. The widely-published refugee accounts in addition to the HRC report submitted in 1978 make it clear that war crimes and crimes against humanity have been committed; these needs to be addressed. This note aside, there are several other matters which may be addressed in a resolution on Cambodia.

As the United Nations has very limited information on the situation in Cambodia, it might be a useful idea to compile a report on the Khmer Rouge regime, victims, crimes against humanity, refugees, etc. Of course, this report should be compiled after the conflict is over. Regardless, more international attention should be given to the situation.

Protection of civilians is a priority as well. In light of the numbers of estimated victims, the issue of protection of civilian as well as refugees is a pressing one. While it is difficult to implement any solutions on protecting civilians while the conflict is ongoing, protecting refugees can be addressed.

What will be done after the Khmer Rouge is removed from power must also be considered; how will the transition period to a new system of government be handled?

Delegates should remain mindful of the Soviet Union and China's veto powers.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. New York Times Articles on Cambodian refugee stories (keep in mind that these are news articles and not official documents, but these may provide insight into knowledge on the Cambodian situation in 1978)

- <http://www.nytimes.com/1970/04/25/archives/refugee-tells-of-flight-from-cambodia.html>
- <http://www.nytimes.com/1978/11/26/archives/holocaust-ii-mcGovern-assails-cambodian-atrocities.html>

Appendix 2. UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. Adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 9th December 1948 and entered into force on 12th January 1951

- <https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%2078/volume-78-I-1021-English.pdf>

Appendix 3. E/CN.4/1335. UN Commission on Human rights 35th Session, Item 12 of the provisional agenda.

This report, although written in 1979, does address what documents and information were available to the international community in 1978. It includes refugee accounts with references to the UN Declaration of Human Rights and how these rights have been violated.

- http://repository.un.org/bitstream/handle/11176/140244/E_CN.4_1335-EN.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

