The imperative of success: United Nations Peacekeeping in Cambodia (1991–1993)

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Fuelling war and enforcing peace

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The Paris Peace Agreements of 23 October 1991 provided for the establishment of UNTAC and constituted the basis of its mandate. In order to get a better understanding of UNTAC's mission, this chapter explores how the peace accords were shaped, why the Cambodian parties agreed to sign it, why the Khmer Rouge were part of it, and how solid this peace was. No pen can describe the tragic and tumultuous history of Cambodia in the second half of the twentieth century, this chapter nonetheless attempts to provide an understanding of how the small Southeast Asian country turned into one of the Cold War's bloodiest battlefields, and then traces the long peace-making process that culminated in the Paris Peace Agreements. It will be demonstrated that the peace settlement was not the result of successful negotiations among Cambodians, but rather a compromise among the great powers who, after having fuelled the conflict, enforced a peace settlement on the Cambodian factions. The signing of the Paris Agreements did not end the hostility between Cambodians but marked the end of a wider conflict that had troubled great-power relations for over a decade.

The creation of a Cold War killing field

Cambodia had been the victim of the power politics of foreign powers for centuries, struggling to survive in between its two larger neighbours, the Kingdom of Siam (Thailand) and the Kingdom of Annam (Vietnam). In 1863, King Norodom I willingly concluded a treaty with the French to save his kingdom from being partitioned by its hostile neighbours. The French progressively consolidated their power over the kingdom-protectorate and most of the colonial era was characterised by political stability.[1] On 23 April 1941, the French Vichy-authorities chose the eighteen-year-old Prince Norodom Sihanouk as the new king. After the end of the Second World War, Sihanouk succeeded to keep Cambodia out of the worst fighting between French forces and the Vietminh, and managed in November 1953 to persuade the French government to grant Cambodia complete independence, shortly before France lost the battle at Dien Bien Phu and blew the retreat from Indochina. In Cambodia, the French colonial era ended as it had begun: in a predominantly non-violent way.[2]

Sihanouk became a popular king but suddenly abdicated in March 1955 to start a political movement, succeeding in his objective to crush the existing parties and win all seats in the national assembly. He became prime minister and transferred all policy-making powers from the crown to the government. During the 1960s, the hardworking and clever prince had himself named Cambodia's head of state and gained a monopoly on power.[3] Cambodia lived through a period

1 David Chandler, *A History of Cambodia* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2008), 168.
2 Jean-Marie Cambacérès, *Norodom Sihanouk: le roi insubmersible* (Paris: le cherche midi, 2013), 92.
3 Chandler, *A History of Cambodia*, 238.

of social and economic progress which would later be referred to as Cambodia's "Golden Age." Phnom Penh was a capital of peace and prosperity with a rich cultural life. Sihanouk, who came to personify Cambodian politics, maintained a Nonaligned foreign policy and introduced his country on the international stage. Besides his many travels abroad, he received world leaders such as Charles de Gaulle in 1966 and celebrities as Jacqueline Kennedy in 1967 on iconic visits.[4]

But all the splendour had its limits. The Cambodian economy was in shambles and the prince made himself unpopular by retreating from his responsibilities, dedicating himself to his favourite hobby of filmmaking, with government funds. He also violently suppressed his political opponents on the left, which resulted in the rising popularity of an underground communist resistance movement under the leadership of a group of Paris-educated intellectuals, with their chairman Saloth Sar, better known by his nom de guerre Pol Pot. The "Khmer Rouge," as Prince Sihanouk called them, operated from the jungles in eastern Cambodia and were supplied and trained by the North Vietnamese communist forces. In 1968, the Khmer Rouge began an uprising against the decaying regime in Phnom Penh.[5] Sihanouk ordered the conservative and anti-communist general Lon Nol, commander of the armed forces, to put down the rebellion. But Lon Nol's violent counterinsurgency campaigns resulted in many casualties among the Cambodian peasants and a rising popularity of the Khmer Rouge.

Sihanouk repeatedly proclaimed Cambodia's neutrality, but he was unable to avoid the war in neighbouring Vietnam spilling over into Cambodia. In an effort to appease Hanoi, he broke off diplomatic relations with Washington and turned a blind eye to North Vietnamese and Vietcong forces using Cambodian territory for sanctuary and a base of operations into South Vietnam. In 1967, American and South Vietnamese units also began infiltrating Cambodian territory in pursuit of their communist enemy, to which Sihanouk acquiesced. Two years later, US president Richard Nixon launched a massive bombing campaign against North Vietnamese forces operating from Cambodia. The carpet bombing of Cambodia's countryside by American B-52s which killed thousands of innocent Cambodians was, according to historian Ben Kiernan, the most important single factor in Pol Pot's rise.[6] Sihanouk's position was further weakened at the expense of General Lon Nol, who became prime minister. In March 1970, while the prince had left Cambodia for his house in Mougins at the French Côte d'Azur, Lon Nol staged a coup d'état and removed Sihanouk from power. The newly established right-wing Khmer Republic was supported by the United States and joined the war against the North Vietnamese communists. The premier of China, Zhou Enlai, with whom Sihanouk maintained a personal friendship since the Bandung Conference of 1955, arranged financial support and a comfortable residence for Sihanouk in Beijing.[7] In order to avenge himself, Sihanouk switched sides and publicly announced the creation of a coalition with the Khmer Rouge against the Lon Nol government.[8]

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4 Cambacérès, *Norodom Sihanouk*, 128; Chandler, *A History of Cambodia*, 232.

5 Paul Thomas Chamberlin, *The Cold War's Killing Fields: Rethinking the Long Peace* (New York: HarperCollins, 2018), 305–9.

6 Bien Kiernan, *The Pol Pot Regime: Race, Power, and Genocide in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge, 1975–79* (New Haven: Yale University Press, Third Edition, 2008), 16.

7 Julio A. Jeldres, *Norodom Sihanouk & Zhou Enlai: an extraordinary friendship on the fringes of the Cold War* (Phnom Penh: Sleuk Rith Institute, 2021).

8 Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (New York: Penguin Book, 1984), 605; Chamberlin, *The Cold War's Killing Fields*, 325.

Khmer Rouge offensives and the withdrawal of American support for the Lon Nol regime eventually led to the collapse of the Khmer Republic. Khmer Rouge forces moved into Phnom Penh on 17 April 1975. Pol Pot and his followers shut off Cambodia from the outside world, renamed the country "Democratic Kampuchea" and transformed it into a totalitarian agrarian slave state ruled by Angkar (the organisation).[9] Sihanouk, though allied with the Khmer Rouge, was put aside by Pol Pot and kept under house arrest at the royal palace. For four years, a reign of terror killed nearly a quarter of the nation's population of 8 million people. The downfall of the genocidal regime came after the Khmer Rouge rekindled the traditional Khmer animosity towards Vietnam and launched a series of attacks in 1977 across the Vietnamese border in a delusionary attempt to reconquer the Mekong Delta that used to belong to the historic Khmer Empire. Beijing supported Pol Pot in order to counter the threat of a Soviet-supported Vietnamese domination of Indochina.[10] Determined to oppose the expansion of Chinese influence in Indochina and cement its alliance with the Soviet Union, Hanoi made the bold but calculated move to launch an invasion into Cambodia on Christmas Day 1978.[11] The battle-hardened Vietnamese troops outclassed the Khmer Rouge and took Phnom Penh within ten days. Pol Pot's forces fled into the jungle hills at the Thai-Cambodian border and Sihanouk took the last flight to Beijing where he was offered asylum. Beijing, whose traditional strategic policy was to divide and weaken Indochina, was unwilling to accept a Vietnamese domination of Cambodia and the danger of an enhanced presence of Hanoi's ally, the Soviet Union, on the Chinese southern periphery.[12] China therefore sent its army across the border into Vietnam to teach Hanoi a "lesson" for their invasion of Cambodia. After a month of fierce fighting and thousands of casualties on both sides, there was no clear winner, but both Hanoi and Beijing declared victory in March 1979. Hanoi installed a puppet-regime in Phnom Penh under the name of the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) and maintained an occupation force of approximately 150,000 troops in the country. Although the arrival of the Vietnamese army ended the four-year-long Khmer Rouge nightmare, and most Cambodians indeed welcomed the Vietnamese as liberators, Hanoi's invasion was perceived in most parts of the world, especially in the West, as an aggressive violation of Cambodia's sovereignty followed by an illegal occupation.[13]

Although Pol Pot's army had been reduced to a small and weakened resistance movement, generous Chinese economic and military support allowed the Khmer Rouge to rebuild their army, which quickly increased its force to around 30,000 troops.[14] A second resistance movement was created by an experienced politician named Son Sann, a Paris-educated economist who had refused

9 Ben Kiernan, *The Pol Pot Regime: Race, Power, and Genocide in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge, 1975–79* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 159–250.

10 Christopher E. Goscha, "La Géopolitique Vietnamienne vue de l'Eurasie: quelles leçons de la troisième guerre d'Indochine pour aujourd'hui ?," *Hérodote* 2, no. 157 (2015): 31.

11 Kosal Path, *Vietnam's strategic thinking during the Third Indochina War* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2020), 52.

12 Robert S. Ross, "China and the Cambodian Peace Process: The Value of Coercive Diplomacy," *Asian Survey* 31, no. 12 (December 1991): 1170. Also see: François Joyaux, *Nouvelle histoire de l'Indochine française* (Paris: Perrin, 2022), 23, 379, 406. The French defeat at Dien Bien Phu was a triumph for Beijing, as it signified the end of the French Empire, which had challenged Chinese strategic influence in Indochina for nearly a century.

13 Nyan Chanda, *Brother Enemy: The War after the War* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986), 370.

14 Sophie Quinn-Judge, "Victory on the battlefield; isolation in Asia: Vietnam's Cambodia decade, 1979–1989," in *The Third Indochina War: Conflict between China, Vietnam and Cambodia, 1972–79,* eds. Odd Arne Westad and Sophie Quin-Judge (London: Routledge, 2006), 218.

to associate himself with Lon Nol or the Khmer Rouge. After the Vietnamese invasion, Son Sann had come back from his exile in France to found the anti-communist Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF). Sihanouk's supporters encouraged the prince to create a royalist resistance movement which he would call the *Front Uni National pour un Cambodge Indépendant, Neutre, Pacifique et Coopératif* (FUNCINPEC). The three resistance groups competed with each other for soldiers, whom they recruited among the 300,000 Cambodian refugees who had fled their country across the border into Thailand, where they were settled in refugee camps, each under the control of one the Cambodian resistance factions.[15] Sihanouk and Son Sann requested military aid from the United States, but Washington redirected them to Beijing. The Chinese, however, insisted that they forge a formal alliance with the Khmer Rouge in return for weapons and supplies. Son Sann refused cooperation with Pol Pot, and Prince Sihanouk set as precondition for the formation of this Faustian bargain that the Khmer Rouge would have to agree, in the case of a Vietnamese withdrawal, to the disarmament of all the Cambodian factions by a United Nations peacekeeping force that would also guarantee the non-return of Vietnamese forces. It was the first time that this idea was put explicitly on the table, ten years before the actual deployment of UNTAC. The Khmer Rouge, however, understood that Sihanouk and Son Sann did not have much choice and outrightly refused to accept Sihanouk's demands. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)[16] also pushed for a broad anti-Vietnamese coalition which they considered to be a necessary condition for reaching a negotiated settlement.[17] In June 1982, the three resistance movements came together in Kuala Lumpur to form the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK), with Sihanouk as president, Son Sann as prime minister and Khieu Samphan, who had been the titular leader of the Khmer Rouge since 1980. Khieu Samphan was an economist with a PhD from the Sorbonne who had served in Sihanouk's government as Under Secretary for Trade before becoming the Chairman of the State Presidium of the Khmer Rouge regime. After the fall of Democratic Kampuchea in 1979, Khieu Samphan was pushed forward by Pol Pot as a supposedly moderate figure in an attempt to seek support from the West and rally Prince Sihanouk to his cause. From 1985 onwards, Samphan was flanked by Son Sen, also an intellectual who had been appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Khmer Rouge army.[18] According to historian Michael Vickery, the CGDK was a "strange creature, a shotgun marriage of three partners whose mutual hatred was only exceeded by their antipathy for the PRK and Vietnamese."[19] The coalition-in-name gave greater political legitimacy to the resistance and was a success for Beijing and Washington who used it as a cheap instrument to weaken Vietnam. The Chinese were essential in keeping the pact together, threatening to cut off all aid if one of the factions would withdraw from the coalition. The non-communist coalition partners could not bring more than 5,000 men each into the field, so most of the fighting was done by the well-

15 Elizabeth Becker, *When the War Was Over: Cambodia and the Khmer Rouge Revolution* (New York: Public Affairs, 1998), 448.

16 The ASEAN member states between 1984 and 1995 included Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Brunei.

17 Becker, *When the war was over*, 457; Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, 381–94.

18 Christophe Peschoux, *Les « nouveaux » Khmers rouges: enquête (1979–1990): reconstruction du mouvement et reconquête des villages* (Paris: l'Harmattan, 1992), 65–67; Stephen Heder, *Pol Pot and Khieu Samphan*, Working Paper 70, published by the Centre of Southeast Asian Studies Monash University, Clayton, Victoria, Australia (1991).

19 Vickery, *Cambodia: A Political Survey*, 1.

supplied Khmer Rouge.[20] Although the resistance never posed a real threat to Vietnamese military control over Cambodia, their guerrilla war in the north-eastern parts of the country continued to consume Vietnamese manpower and resources. Moreover, since China maintained an army of up to 300,000 troops along the Sino-Vietnamese border, where small clashes continued to occur, Vietnam's military was compelled to stay on constant alert.[21] The Third Indochina War, as the conflict between Cambodia, Vietnam and China is referred to by historians, perpetuated throughout the 1980s, though at a lower intensity, until a peace settlement was finally reached in 1991.

Ending the Third Indochina War: competition among the peacemakers

The Third Indochina War was a complex conflict, an entanglement of a civil war in Cambodia, a struggle for hegemony between China and Vietnam, and a regional battleground of superpower rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union, and thus part of what historian Odd Arne Westad described as the Global Cold War.[22] The complicated multi-layered nature of the conflict meant that a willingness to find a political settlement at the regional level could be impeded by the great powers, and a solution at the global level would not necessarily mean a peace among the Cambodians. In search for a solution to the conflict, different peacemakers competed with each other to reach a settlement that protected their interests.

In the first half of the 1980s, some diplomatic steps were taken, but no real negotiations were held. When UN Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim visited Hanoi in April 1979, the Vietnamese government made it clear that it was willing to withdraw its troops from Cambodia if China promised to cease its support to the Khmer Rouge, but Beijing was not ready to end this cheap and effective way of weakening Vietnam.[23] Within ASEAN there was a consensus that China's anti-Vietnamese strategy did not serve a stable Southeast Asia, free from great-power interventions. But ASEAN struggled to maintain its unity: Whereas Thailand remained wary of Vietnamese hegemonic ambitions in Indochina and played a key logistic role in providing the resistance with Chinese weapons and supplies, Indonesia and Malaysia saw China as the more important long-term threat to stability in the region and took a more conciliatory approach towards Hanoi. On 13 July 1981, the United Nations convened the International Conference on Kampuchea (ICK) in New York. The conference was a failure because Phnom Penh, Hanoi and Moscow boycotted the diplomatic event.[24] An ASEAN proposal for the complete withdrawal of Vietnamese forces, followed by the full disarmament of the Cambodian factions, the establishment of an interim government, and the organisation of free elections also ran into heavy Chinese and Khmer Rouge opposition. ASEAN countries were also particularly shocked that they could

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20 Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, 394.

21 Ross, "China and the Cambodian Peace Process," 1175.

22 Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World interventions and the making of our times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016) and Odd Arne Westad, "Introduction: From war to peace to war in Indochina," in: *The Third Indochina War: Conflict between China, Vietnam and Cambodia, 1972–79*, eds. Odd Arne Westad and Sophie Quin-Judge (London: Routledge, 2006).

23 Michael Haas, *Cambodia, Pol Pot, and the United States: The Faustian Pact* (New York: Praeger 1991), 61

24 Interview by James S. Sutterlin with Hédi Annabi, 1995, New York, Yale-UN Oral History project, Dag Hammarskjold Library, New York.

not count on support from Washington, which instead pressured them to accept the Chinese position.[25] Paris, that neither recognised the PRK nor the CGDK, manifested itself as neutral mediator with a special responsibility vis-à-vis Cambodia. France, with the socialist government of President François Mitterrand in office, was one of the few non-Soviet countries to provide economic aid to Hanoi, while maintaining close relations with Prince Sihanouk. Foreign Minister Claude Cheysson visited Vietnam in March 1983 where he declared that he did not wish to see Vietnamese troops leave Cambodia as to prevent Pol Pot from returning to power. A month later, however, President Mitterrand received Prince Sihanouk in Paris and made an official visit to Beijing where he condemned the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia.[26]

The Cambodian conflict remained in full stalemate, but from 1985 onwards, Hanoi and Phnom Penh expressed an increasing willingness to talk about a peace settlement with the non-communist coalition partners of the CGDK. They negotiated from a position of strength on the battlefield since a powerful offensive of the Vietnamese army had led to the destruction of all Khmer Rouge and non-communist military bases in Cambodia, driving the resistance forces into sanctuary across the Thai border. The Vietnamese desire to find a peace settlement was especially motivated by economic factors, as has been argued by historian Balázs Szalontai.[27] Hanoi's occupation of Cambodia was a heavy burden, costing $1 billion a year and the lives of thousands of Vietnamese soldiers (eventually, a total of 55,000 Vietnamese were killed in Cambodia).[28] A younger generation of leaders, rising to power within the Vietnamese Communist Party, launched an economic reform programme called *Doi Moi* (Renovation). Suffering from international trade embargoes and eager to establish new economic relations with its ASEAN neighbours, the West and China, Hanoi announced its intention to withdraw all its troops from Cambodia before 1990. The Vietnamese gradually reduced their forces and built up a regular Cambodian army with Soviet support. In January 1985, UN Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar visited Vietnam and other Southeast Asian countries to talk about the Cambodian problem. The Vietnamese had just put in place a new prime minister of the PRK: the 32-year-old political talent Hun Sen, a former Khmer Rouge officer who had defected to the Vietnamese in 1977 to escape Pol Pot's purges. Hun Sen, belonging to the progressive wing in Phnom Penh believing in economic liberalisation, realised that the country would collapse if it did not climb out of international isolation and actively sought a dialogue with countries in the region. Australia's foreign minister, Bill Hayden, who maintained constructive contacts with Hanoi, was the first in a row of regional leaders to meet with Hun Sen to talk about possible solutions for the Cambodian conflict. During their encounter in Ho Chi Minh City, in March 1985, Hun Sen indicated that he was ready to make concessions to Sihanouk and Son Sann if they would distance themselves from the Khmer Rouge. Hayden proposed to organise a peace conference in Canberra and establish a tribunal to try the Khmer Rouge leadership for their crimes against humanity. But these initiatives created

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25 Chanda, *Brother Enemy,* 389–92.

26 Eric Teo, "The New French Socialist Foreign Policy and Indochina," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 6, no. 3 (December 1984): 224; Ng Shui Meng, "Vietnam in 1983: Keeping a Delicate Balance," *Southeast Asian Affairs* (1984): 265.

27 Balázs Szalontai, "From battlefield into marketplace: The end of the Cold War in Indochina, 1985–1989," in *The End of the Cold War and the Third World: New perspectives on regional conflict,* eds. Artemy M. Kalinovsky and Sergey Radchenko (New York: Routledge, 2011), 163, 168.

28 Nick B. Williams Jr., "Hanoi Puts Its Cambodia Toll at 55,000 Dead," *Los Angeles Times*, 1 July 1988.

tensions with Washington and ASEAN which both rebuffed the Australian proposal.[29]

Two of the foremost Cambodia experts, historians Ben Kiernan and Michael Vickery, have made the point that a peace agreement that excluded the Khmer Rouge could have been brokered within the Southeast Asian sphere by 1985, but regional diplomatic efforts were outflanked by China and the United States that wanted a peace settlement on their terms, which were based on weakening Vietnam and undermining its "puppet regime" in Phnom Penh.[30] Although the Reagan administration publicly declared that it would never accept a Khmer Rouge return to power, it continued to recognise the CGDK and actively support it. The horrors of the Pol Pot regime were by now well known to the world (Roland Joffé's 1984 movie *The Killing Fields* had strongly contributed to this), but Washington, embittered by its defeat in the Vietnam War, and preoccupied with maintaining good relations with China and containing the Soviet Union, refused to use the term "genocide." To do so would be to admit that the Vietnamese invasion had indeed been a legitimate intervention and not an illegal act of expansionism.[31]

Just how strongly the Third Indochina War was part of the Global Cold War is revealed by the fact that the real breakthrough towards a solution only came after Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in the Soviet Union in March 1985. Gorbachev understood that the Soviet Union had overextended itself and that its solidarity with Hanoi was not only costly in resources but was also undermining its relations with countries in the Asia-Pacific region. On 28 July 1986, the new General Secretary made a momentous speech in Vladivostok in which he announced the Soviet Union's pivot to Asia, hoping that better relations with the Far East could help revitalise the Soviet economy and give Moscow a leading role in this part of the world.[32] A normalisation of the USSR's relations with Beijing was central in Gorbachev's Asian strategy, but Chinese leaders indicated that several obstacles had to be removed first, of which the most important was the Soviet support for the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia. Moscow agreed to solve the Cambodian question with urgency, and in a demonstration of goodwill acquiesced to the Khmer Rouge's inclusion – "except Pol Pot and his high-ranking accomplices" – in the negotiations for a political settlement.[33]

Sihanouk, who considered himself the father of modern Cambodia, was determined to return to his country as its saviour, and temporarily resigned as president of the CGDK to give himself a more neutral status. Hun Sen was eager to meet with the prince, and a first meeting between the two Cambodian leaders was organised by the French diplomat Claude Martin, the director of the Asia department at the *Quai d'Orsay* (the French foreign ministry). Martin, who maintained good contacts with Sihanouk, saw an opportunity to give France a leading role in the Cambodian peace process, using its special relationship with the prince and good rapports with Beijing, Hanoi and Moscow. Putting the profoundly Francophile prince at the centre of a political

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29 Indonesia and Malaysia, individually, replied positively to Hayden's proposals. Horner and Connor, *The Good International Citizen,* 62–64; Kiernan, "The Inclusion of the Khmer Rouge," 195.

30 Kiernan, "The Inclusion of the Khmer Rouge," 91; Vickery, *Cambodia: A Political Survey*, 3–7. Also see: Charles McGregor, "China, Vietnam, and the Cambodian Conflict: Beijing's End Game Strategy," *Asian Survey* 30, no. 3 (March 1990): 269.

31 Quinn-Judge, "Victory on the battlefield," 220.

32 Pierre Grosser, *L'histoire du monde se fait en Asie: une autre vision du XXe siècle* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2017) 519, 536; Elizabeth Becker, "The Progress of Peace in Cambodia," *Current History* 88, no. 537 (April 1989): 169; Quinn-Judge, "Victory on the battlefield," 225.

33 Szalontai, "From battlefield into marketplace," 161.

solution would also protect France's interests in Southeast Asia. On 2 December 1987, Sihanouk and Hun Sen met for the first time in a château in Fère-en-Tardenois, a village between Paris and Reims. The meeting was a success. Hun Sen and the prince got along very well, and after three days of constructive discussions they signed a joint communiqué in which they pledged to work towards a political settlement of the conflict. Three weeks later, they met for a second time in Saint-Germain-en-Laye.[34]

Meanwhile, ASEAN countries also continued their peace-making efforts and were somewhat piqued by France's interference in a matter they considered to be their *chasse gardée*. In July 1988, Ali Alatas, the foreign minister of Indonesia, succeeded, in close coordination with Vietnam, in bringing together for the first time the three resistance factions and Hun Sen for an informal meeting – called a "cocktail party" – in the palace of Bogor, near Jakarta. Khieu Samphan represented the Khmer Rouge, with Pol Pot remaining in charge in the background. The Cambodians were joined by Vietnam, Laos and ASEAN countries to discuss the international dimensions of a peace settlement.[35] Surprised they had not received an invitation for this important conference, the French persuaded Sihanouk not to attend the meeting, making the point that it was France that held the key to Sihanouk, to the chagrin of the Indonesians. To end the competition between the peace brokers, French foreign minister Roland Dumas, proposed Indonesia to become co-president of an international conference on Cambodia that would be held in Paris, which Alatas accepted.[36]

Though Hun Sen's army maintained the upper hand on the battlefield and Vietnamese troops continued to leave Cambodia, Beijing insisted on including the Khmer Rouge in a peace settlement in exchange for cutting their supply line. The Soviets, who were impatient to find a solution for Cambodia, pressured the Vietnamese to be flexible and agree to the inclusion of the Khmer Rouge in a peace settlement. Hanoi knew that with Sino-Soviet relations improving, it stood weaker vis-à-vis China. The decreasing Soviet commitment to Vietnamese military security became apparent in March 1988 when Moscow did not intervene in the Sino-Vietnamese naval clashes over the Spratly Islands, in which the Vietnamese lost three ships and more than sixty men.[37] In April 1989, Hanoi announced that it would withdraw its last remaining forces from Cambodia by September of the same year. Beijing immediately reduced its military pressure along the Sino-Vietnamese border and opened negotiations with Hanoi. A month later, Gorbachev made a trip to China as an important symbolic step in the normalisation of Sino-Soviet relations.[38] These developments created momentum for a political settlement of the Cambodian problem.

Negotiations between the Cambodian factions also seemed to be going towards a positive conclusion, but into a different direction. In May 1989, Sihanouk and Hun Sen reached agreement on key issues, such as the formation of a four-party National Reconciliation Council, headed by Sihanouk, that would organise the disarmament of all Cambodian factions as well as elections, under supervision of a small international control mechanism. Sihanouk also dropped his previous

34 Claude Martin, *La diplomatie n'est pas un dîner de gala* (Paris: Éditions de l'aube, 2018), 514; Becker, *When the war was over*, 472–75.
35 William S. Turley, "The Khmer war: Cambodia after Paris," *Survival* 32, no. 5 (September/October 1990): 439.
36 Martin, *La diplomatie,* 525, 561.
37 McGregor, "China, Vietnam, and the Cambodian Conflict," 282; Ross, "China and the Cambodian Peace Process," 1175.
38 Quinn-Judge, "Victory on the battlefield," 225–26.

demand to dismantle Hun Sen's government before the elections.[39] Hun Sen, in return, responded to Sihanouk's request to rebrand the PRK as the "State of Cambodia" (SOC), restore Buddhism as the national religion and adopt a new flag that resembled the one of the former Kingdom of Cambodia. Though the single-party state remained in place, the name of the Kampuchean People's Revolutionary Party (KPRP) was changed into the Cambodian People's Party (CPP). Communism was sworn off, private property rights reintroduced and the door opened to foreign investments. The SOC's new constitution stated that Cambodia was a neutral and Non-Aligned country. Hun Sen was willing to take these measures as they served his effort to rid himself of his image as a puppet of Hanoi and make his regime internationally more acceptable.[40] The time looked ripe for a peace agreement.

On 30 July 1989, France and Indonesia convened the peace conference on Cambodia in the Hôtel Majestic at the avenue Kléber in Paris, the same conference centre where in 1973 the peace accords had been negotiated and signed that aimed to end the Second Indochina War. Foreign ministers of nineteen countries attended: the five permanent members of the UN Security Council (China, France, the United Kingdom, the United States and the Soviet Union), Vietnam, Laos, the six ASEAN member states (Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Brunei), Canada and India as the neutral monitors of the 1954 Geneva Accords that had settled the First Indochina War, Zimbabwe as president of the Non-Aligned movement, Japan because of its ambition to become a leading nation in Asian affairs, and Australia because of its good relation with Indonesia and earlier initiatives by Bill Hayden. The Secretary-General of the United Nations, Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, also attended. In the days preceding the conference, France and Indonesia successfully persuaded the leaders of the four Cambodian factions to accept a symbolic but important compromise: Son Sann, Sihanouk, Hun Sen and Khieu Samphan agreed to sit together in the conference room behind a five-metre-long nameplate labelled "*C a m b o d g e*." But despite the reconciliatory picture of the Cambodians sitting shoulder to shoulder, they quickly entrenched themselves deeper into their positions. Khmer Rouge representative Khieu Samphan was uncompromising, making an aggressive and hypocritical opening speech in which he compared the Vietnamese occupation with crimes committed by the Nazis in the Second World War. Sihanouk also took an unexpected recalcitrant stance, accusing Hun Sen and the Vietnamese while defending the Khmer Rouge. It revealed that the prince still stood under strong pressure from Beijing, where he resided in great comfort at the expense of the Chinese government; from the Khmer Rouge, who formed the only credible military force in the resistance against Phnom Penh and Hanoi; as well as from some members within his own party who disapproved of his deals with Hun Sen and forced him to adopt hard-line positions.[41]

After the first days of plenary sessions during which the great powers promised disengagement from their Cambodian clients once an agreement was reached, the ministers left Paris while the experts of the delegations broke up in different committees for three weeks to work out the details of a comprehensive political settlement. The discussions were based on papers produced by two of Pérez de Cuéllar's staff members of the UN Secretariat, the Tunisian Hédi Annabi and

39 Michael Haas, "The Paris conference on Cambodia, 1989," *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 23, no. 2 (1991), 43; Turley, "The Khmer war: Cambodia after Paris," 440.

40 Sebastian Strangio, *Cambodia: From Pol Pot to Hun Sen and Beyond* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), 40.

41 Haas, "The Paris conference on Cambodia, 1989," 45; Martin, *La diplomatie,* 590; Becker, *When the War was Over*, 490.

the Pakistani Rafeeuddin Ahmed, who had been working on a plan for a United Nations role in implementing a comprehensive political settlement for Cambodia.[42] The working groups focusing on the external aspects of the Cambodian conflict made significant progress, but the Cambodian factions remained in total deadlock. The main problem was that the factions could not come to an agreement about a power-sharing arrangement pending elections. Khieu Samphan demanded the complete dismantlement of the Phnom Penh government, which was unacceptable for Hun Sen, who refused any Khmer Rouge participation in a quadripartite interim administration. The factions also couldn't agree on the tasks and composition of an international control mechanism that would oversee the transition to a newly elected government. The resistance wanted a United Nations mission to disarm the factions and organise elections. Hun Sen and Hanoi, however, did not want a heavy UN involvement and instead proposed an ad hoc International Control Mechanism similar to the Geneva conference of 1954, in which a small number of acceptable countries would supervise elections to be organised by the State of Cambodia itself.[43] But Pérez de Cuéllar had cleverly put his foot in the door by proposing to send a UN fact-finding mission to Cambodia. When all conference participants accepted this, a survey mission was immediately dispatched and published a report. This made it more difficult to deny the UN a central role in the peace process.[44]

Although the delegates of the conference worked day and night for thirty days, a comprehensive settlement could not be reached, and the foreign ministers did not come back to Paris for a final signing act, as was planned. It was not only the irreconcilable positions of the Cambodians that led to the conference's failure, but also the unwillingness of the great powers to put enough pressure on their Cambodian clients to compromise. With the Vietnamese troop withdrawal scheduled for the next month, China and the United States had basically already obtained what they needed. The Paris conference was held only two months after the Tiananmen Square massacre of 4 June 1989, and the Chinese foreign minister, Qian Qichen, made his first appearance on the international stage since these events had shocked the world. The Beijing massacre had significant consequences for the dynamics of the Cambodian peace process. China had lost much of its bargaining power vis-à-vis the Soviet Union because it found itself politically and economically isolated, while the relationship between the Moscow and the West was improving. The only remaining source of leverage Beijing maintained on the international stage was its influence over the Khmer Rouge, so it was determined to use it in maintaining its strategic influence in Indochina and achieve the dissolution of the pro-Vietnamese government in Phnom Penh.[45] Although Qichen made a conciliatory opening speech, the Chinese continued to protect their Khmer Rouge clients behind the scenes. The United States did not mind either to postpone a peace settlement until a later moment when the non-communist resistance factions might be in a stronger position on the battlefield vis-à-vis Phnom Penh.[46] American political scientist and Cambodia expert Michael Haas observed that while Vietnam and Hun Sen made important concessions, Beijing and Washington, supported by Bangkok and Singapore, aimed

42 Interview by James Sutterlin with Hédi Annabi.
43 Brown and Zasloff, *Cambodia Confounds the Peacemakers*, 56; Ratner, *The New UN Peacekeeping*, 144.
44 Interview by James Sutterlin with Hédi Annabi.
45 Ross, "China and the Cambodian Peace Process," 1177.
46 Turley, "The Khmer war: Cambodia after Paris," 441.

to impose "a treaty of surrender" on Phnom Penh and Hanoi.[47] The French tried to save the conference by making a last-minute proposal for a compromise solution, which received sufficient international support, but could not lead to an agreement because of the complete lack of mutual trust among the Cambodians. At the end of the conference, Hun Sen declared that he had been "fooled by Sihanouk."[48] To avoid the impression of complete failure, the co-presidents decided to "suspend" the conference. There was a strong feeling of disappointment, that it had all been a waste of time and money, especially with the French who paid the entire bill of 2.5 million dollars for their grand conference. The Security Council's five permanent members (P5) decided that, since the Cambodian factions seemed unable to find agreement among themselves, the great powers would have to work out the basis for a peace agreement to which the Cambodian factions would simply have to comply.

In the month after the Paris conference, all Vietnamese troops withdrew from Cambodia, and resistance forces immediately launched attacks in Western Cambodia. The non-communist forces regained some terrain, but the Khmer Rouge successfully seized the gem-mining district of Pailin and threatened to take the provincial capitals of Sisophon and Battambang. For a moment, the balance on the battlefield seemed to have changed in favour of the resistance, but Hun Sen's forces launched a successful counterattack in which they retook almost all lost positions, except for Pailin. Phnom Penh maintained in control of 90 per cent of Cambodia.[49] As the war in Cambodia continued, so did the competition among the peacemakers. Nobody knew exactly how to proceed after the failed Paris conference, until Australia gave new air to the discussions by promoting the idea of establishing a UN interim authority in Cambodia. This concept was not new. It had already been pushed for years by Stephen Solarz, a US Congressman from New York and chairman of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, who maintained close contacts with Prince Sihanouk, and had tried to bring the situation in Cambodia to the attention in Washington.[50] After the inconclusive Paris conference, Solarz actively continued his lobby and promised Australian foreign minister Gareth Evans that he would nominate him for the Nobel Peace Prize if he was willing to pick up the idea and successfully sell it in other capitals.[51] Evans, who was trying to shape Australia's future as an active regional power in Asia, sensed an opportunity to claim a central role in the Cambodian peace process.[52] Without prior consultation with the United Nations or the P5, Evans turned Solarz's idea for an enhanced UN role in Cambodia into an "Australian initiative for

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47 Haas, "The Paris conference on Cambodia, 1989," 43, 52.

48 Becker, *When the War was Over*, 492.

49 Turley, "The Khmer war: Cambodia after Paris," 442.

50 See: Stephen J. Solarz, "Cambodia and the international community," *Foreign Affairs* (Spring 1990), 99–115; Stephen J. Solarz, "Support the UN Plan for Cambodia," *The International Herald Tribune*, 9 October 1990.

51 Gareth Evans, *Incorrigible Optimist: A Political Memoir* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2017), 155; Gareth Evans, "The Comprehensive political Settlement to the Cambodia Conflict: An Exercise in Cooperating for Peace," in *International Peacekeeping: Building on the Cambodian Experience*, ed. Hugh Smith (Canberra: Australian Defence Studies Centre, 1994), 1–13; Becker, *When the war was over*, 496.

52 Gareth Evans, "Australia's Asian future: Address by Senator Gareth Evans, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade to launch the Institute for Contemporary Asian Studies, Monash University (19 July 1990)," 3; Ken Berry, *Cambodia – From Red to Blue: Australia's initiative for peace* (St. Leonards: Allen & Unwin in association with the Dept. of International Relations, Australian National University, 1997); Evans, *Incorrigible Optimist*, 152. Australia's 1987 Defence White Paper described South-East Asia as Australia's "region of primary strategic interest", see: Kim C. Beazley, *The Defence of Australia 1987* (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1987), 8.

peace."[53]

As the Berlin Wall came down in November 1989, Washington felt the moment was right to speed up negotiations about Cambodia and took the initiative to call together representatives of the P5 in Paris on 16 January 1990. Richard Solomon, the US Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs persuaded his French and Soviet colleagues – and fellow Sinologists – Claude Martin and Igor Rogachev that the power-sharing problem could best be resolved by giving the United Nations an enhanced role in the peace process. The fact that the three diplomats spoke in fluent Mandarin with China's vice-foreign minister Xu Dunxin obviously helped in working towards a compromise with Beijing. The P5 diplomats met five more times alternatively every other month in Paris and New York, together with Rafeeuddin Ahmed and Hédi Annabi, to work out the main elements of a peace agreement. The main issues on the table were to resolve the issue of power-sharing among the factions and to reconcile a role for the United Nations with Cambodia's sovereignty. The solution was found in the creation of a Supreme National Council (SNC), representing the four factions, which would enshrine the sovereignty of Cambodia during the transition to a new government and grand a collective consent to a UN peacekeeping operation. The precise composition of such a council of national reconciliation remained open for debate.[54]

On invitation of his Indonesian colleague Ali Alatas, Australian foreign minister Evans participated in a meeting with the Cambodian factions in Jakarta in late February 1990, where he tabled a collection of working papers which he called the "Red Book," because of its red cover, containing concrete proposals for an operationalisation of a UN role.[55] The Australian assertiveness irritated Claude Martin, who believed that the Australians had no legitimate role to play in the Cambodian peace process. Evans felt exactly the same about France, whose stature as a former colonial power in Indochina was not considered as a positive factor in Australia.[56] Australian narratives generally attribute central importance to Evans' initiative in pushing the peace process forward, but the proposals in the Red Book largely merged with the ideas that were already under discussion by the P5, who subsequently paid lip service to the Australians.[57] The Red Book nonetheless helped to get the idea for a UN role accepted by the Cambodian factions, who trusted Evans, and stimulated the discussion on a concrete operationalisation of the concept.[58]

The blueprint for a UN operation in Cambodia was largely based on a multidimensional UN operation that had been deployed to Namibia in April 1989, after a long delay of more than

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53 Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, *Pilgrimage for Peace: A Secretary-General's Memoir* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997), 507; Horner and Connor, *The Good International* Citizen, 90; Richard H. Solomon, *Exiting Indochina: U.S. Leadership of the Cambodia Settlement & Normalization with Vietnam* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2000), 54.

54 Ratner, *The New UN Peacekeeping*, 144; Becker, *When the war was over*, 498.

55 Cambodia: An Australian Peace Proposal, Working Papers prepared for the Informal Meeting on Cambodia, Jakarta, 26–28 February 1990, United Nations Archives, New York (UNA), S-1854-0016-0003.

56 Largely because of the nuclear test in the South Pacific in the 1980s: Interview by Jean Krasno with Gareth Evans, 10 December 1997, New York, Yale-UN Oral History Project, Dag Hammarskjold Library, United Nations, New York; Becker, *When the war was over*, 500; Martin, *La diplomatie*, 536.

57 See: Gareth Evans, *Incorrigible Optimist*, 156; Berry, *Cambodia*, 76, 315; Horner and Connor, *The good international citizen*, 111; Findlay, *Cambodia*, 17. The U.N. Secretary-General's representative Rafeeuddin Ahmed has stated that "everybody certainly gave lip service" to the Australian initiative, but in the end, the Australians were "not so important" that their Red Book "had no importance" in the negotiations, and that the Australian draft single negotiating text "did nothing." See: Interview by James S. Sutterlin with Rafeeuddin Ahmed, New York, date unknown, Yale-UN Oral History Project, call number at the Yale University Archives: MS 1703 box 1, folder 2.

58 Becker, *When the war was over*, 498; Solomon, *Exiting Indochina*, 56, 74.

ten years. UNTAG was to ensure the peaceful transfer of power in Namibia from South Africa to a new Namibian government. It was the first multidimensional UN operation that gave UN peacekeepers a multitude of new tasks. A UN military force of nearly 4,500 personnel supervised not only a fragile cease-fire, but also the withdrawal of South African forces and the disarmament of Namibian forces. An election division supervised an electoral process and educated voters about democracy. In November 1989, elections for a constituent assembly in Namibia were conducted very smoothly, with a 97 per cent turnout and no violent incidents. UNTAG's successful completion of its entire mandate contributed to the sense that this sort of the new peacekeeping could work in Cambodia as well.[59]

Bangkok and Tokyo also attempted to get more directly involved in the Cambodian peace process with the aim to broker a regional deal, independent of the P5's consultations working towards a comprehensive settlement. As Vietnamese troops were gradually withdrawing from Cambodia, Thai entrepreneurs pressured their government to open up to Hanoi and exploit trading opportunities. The new prime minister of Thailand, Chatichai Choonhavan, who had been democratically elected in July 1988, agreed with their arguments and famously stated that he wanted to turn Indochina from "a battleground into a market place." The pragmatic Chatichai established close contacts with Hun Sen and radically changed Bangkok's stance on Cambodia by proposing a step-by-step peace settlement that included ASEAN, Vietnam, and the Cambodian factions.[60] Tokyo also jumped in and organised a peace conference on 5 June 1990 with two delegations, one headed by Sihanouk, representing the resistance, and a second delegation led by Hun Sen. The Khmer Rouge boycotted the conference because it was not invited as an independent party but only as a member of the Sihanouk delegation. This allowed Sihanouk and Son Sann to disregard the Khmer Rouge and move closer to Hun Sen, with whom they found agreement around the establishment of a Supreme National Council, from which the Khmer Rouge were excluded. The Tokyo Conference saw a move towards a more realistic settlement that acknowledged the undeniable fact that Hun Sen's government controlled 90 per cent of Cambodia.[61] But Washington expressed great displeasure about both Bangkok's and Tokyo's initiatives that shifted the balance in favour of the State of Cambodia, and brought its allies back in line by threatening with economic consequences.[62]

Several major developments led to an acceleration in the negotiations between the great powers about Cambodia. First, Chinese and Vietnamese political leaders held a series of secret meetings aimed at resolving their differences and restore normal relations.[63] Second, in July 1990, the US foreign secretary James Baker III stunned the world when he announced in Paris, standing next to his Soviet colleague Eduard Shevardnadze, that the United States would withdraw diplomatic recognition of the CGDK and open direct talks with Hanoi and Phnom Penh about the settlement of the Cambodian conflict. Washington's sudden about-face with regard to its Cambodia policy was the result of the increasing pressure exercised by the US Congress on the

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59 Bellamy and Williams, *Understanding peacekeeping*, 237; Ratner, *The New UN Peacekeeping*, 118–23.

60 Szalontai, "From battlefield into marketplace," 163.

61 Yasuhiro Takeda, "Japan's Role in the Cambodian Peace Process: Diplomacy, Manpower, and Finance," *Asian Survey* 38, no. 6 (June 1998): 555.

62 Roberts, *Political Transition in Cambodia*, 19; Kiernan, "The Inclusion of the Khmer Rouge," 204–5.

63 Ratner, *The New UN Peacekeeping*, 145.

Bush administration to stop the indirect American support for the Khmer Rouge, which American public opinion began to consider as too immoral to sustain.[64] Beijing realised that it would soon be isolated as the sole supporter of the Khmer Rouge and dropped its long-standing demand to fully dismantle the Hun Sen government. As a consequence, the P5 quickly reached consensus on a draft "framework document" they had been discussing with the UN Secretariat that reflected a plan for achieving two objectives that protected the P5's common interests: removing the Phnom Penh government and preventing a Khmer Rouge return to power. The plan did not foresee the complete dismantlement of Hun Sen's government, but its key ministries (foreign affairs, defence, finance, public security and information) were to be put under direct control of a United Nations Transitional Authority in order to neutralise its advantage during "free and fair" elections for a constituent assembly. The UN peacekeeping force would be tasked with the organisation of these elections as well as with the full disarmament and demobilisation of the Cambodian factions' armies. It was decided to make the Khmer Rouge full members of the Supreme National Council with the calculation that, in the end, they would be beaten in the political arena, presuming that Cambodian voters would despise them. The power of democracy would do its work, was the idea.[65]

As the P5 had written out their plan for peace in November 1990, they set out to try to sell it to the Cambodian factions, to ASEAN and Vietnam.[66] But this posed a challenge because the P5 framework included the Khmer Rouge, whereas in the negotiations among the Cambodian factions, agreement was only possible between Sihanouk, Son Sann and Hun Sen, excluding the Khmer Rouge. Notwithstanding this reality, the P5 proceeded to push the Cambodians to accept their peace plan through a policy of "coercive diplomacy," as characterised by political scientist Sorpong Peou.[67] The P5's decision to impose a solution must also be understood in the context of other events and crises, such as Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and the following Gulf War, which demanded much of their attention. In December 1990, when Roland Dumas called the Cambodian factions to Paris, he warned them that the international community could not indefinitely focus its attention on the fate of Cambodia if the Cambodians themselves did not show the political will to reach a settlement. He presented the P5's framework document as a "take-it-or-leave-it" deal. The resistance factions were ready to accept it, as it was clearly to their advantage, but Hun Sen continued to object to a UN role in controlling important parts of his government, which he viewed as a violation of Cambodia's national sovereignty, as well as to the disarmament of his entire army before the elections, which would make his government vulnerable vis-à-vis the Khmer Rouge. The army of the Phnom Penh government, the Cambodian People's Armed Forces (CPAF), was located at fixed military bases throughout the country, whereas nobody knew exactly where the isolated Khmer Rouge's jungle camps were, making it much easier for them to cheat by hiding weapons and soldiers from UN inspectors. Hun Sen also pressed for measures to exclude the Khmer Rouge in case they would subvert the peace agreement.[68] The stalemate continued, although the factions agreed to pursue their negotiations.

64 Becker, *When the war was over*, 501.
65 Peou, *Conflict Neutralization,* 150–51.
66 Interview by James Sutterlin with Hédi Annabi.
67 Peou, *Conflict Neutralization*, 171.
68 Kiernan, "The Cambodian crisis," 17; Haas, "The Paris conference on Cambodia, 1989," 45.

In January 1991, a delegation from France, Indonesia and the United Nations travelled to Hanoi to sell the P5 framework for a peace agreement, but the Vietnamese refused to accept to weaken the authority of the Phnom Penh government.[69] They argued that Cambodia was a sovereign state and that the Cambodian conflict was a civil war that should primarily be resolved among Cambodians, not by a P5-imposed settlement. Hanoi was also sceptical about such an intrusive role of the United Nations and protested against giving political legitimacy to the Khmer Rouge, who continued to receive arms from Beijing, including a recent shipment of twenty-four tanks.[70] But Vietnam was in a weak negotiating position. Communist states in Europe were collapsing and Hanoi's former patron, the Soviet Union, was disintegrating.[71] The Soviet-Vietnamese alliance had practically ceased to exist, and Moscow now tried to persuade Hanoi to just accept the P5 plan. Ultimately, it was Chinese and American pressure that made Hanoi more flexible. Beijing calculated that the prospect of a prolonged civil war would eventually compel Hanoi to make compromises. It threatened to continue its military support to the Khmer Rouge and put the unconditional acceptance of the P5 peace plan as the first precondition for a normalisation of Sino-Vietnamese relations.[72] Washington played the same card. Since Hanoi had fulfilled the precondition to withdraw its troops from Cambodia in September 1989, it had been eagerly waiting for the United States to restore diplomatic relations and lift its trade embargos. But Washington had so far refused to do so and instead presented a "roadmap" for the normalisation of relations, in which the primary condition was Hanoi's acceptance of the P5 plan for a comprehensive peace settlement and demanded Hanoi to put pressure on Phnom Penh to accept it as well.[73]

As long as there was no definitive peace agreement, the great powers continued to protect their interests in Indochina and supply their clients with military aid, thus fuelling the conflict. In February 1991, Tokyo made a new attempt to break the deadlock by presenting a new peace plan that aimed to address Hun Sen's objections to the P5's peace plan and reach a settlement among the Cambodian factions themselves, not by imposition from the P5. The Japanese plan introduced two concrete proposals. The first was to include a provision in the peace agreement that stated that any faction that violated the agreements would be deprived of its right to participate in the elections. Secondly, Tokyo called for the establishment of a special committee to investigate the crimes of the Pol Pot regime. Hun Sen endorsed the Japanese peace plan as a more balanced alternative for the P5's proposals. Son Sann and Sihanouk had no objections to the plan, but the Khmer Rouge outrightly rejected it. Washington also expressed its strong disapproval of the Japanese initiative, saying that it might "confuse the international effort."[74] In the next few months, Hun Sen and Sihanouk moved away further from the P5 plan and the Khmer Rouge. They decided to declare an indefinite cease-fire and found agreement around a limited role for the United Nations, with a modest peacekeeping force of about 700 lightly armed soldiers. In June 1991, France and Indonesia demonstrated a willingness to accept modifications of the P5 peace

69 Interview by James Sutterlin with Hédi Annabi.
70 Peou, *Conflict Neutralization*, 160–63.
71 Frederick Z. Brown, "Cambodia in 1991: An Uncertain Peace," *Asian* Survey 32, no. 1 (January 1992) 89; Gary Klintworth, "Cambodia 1992: Hopes Fading," *Southeast Asian Affairs* (1993): 89.
72 Ross, "China and the Cambodian Peace Process," 1179.
73 Heininger, *Peacekeeping in Transition*, 24; Peou, *Conflict Neutralization*, 169–71.
74 Takeda, "Japan's Role in the Cambodian Peace Process," 556.

plan.[75]

A final breakthrough came, again, as the result of a change in leadership, this time in Hanoi. Several anti-Chinese hardliners within the Vietnamese government resigned in the summer of 1991. The replacement of Nguyen Co Thach by Nguyen Manh Cam as foreign minister immediately improved the Sino-Vietnamese contacts. Bilateral consultations allegedly led to a consensus between Beijing and Hanoi around the inclusion of the Khmer Rouge and a minimum involvement of the United Nations, with a force of only a few hundred observers. Beijing seemed willing to make a compromise with Hanoi, but Washington continued to refuse to accept any solution reached between China and Vietnam that went contrary to the original P5 plan.[76] Eventually, it was the American obstinacy that made Hanoi bow. In June 1991, when the Cambodian factions met first in Thailand and then in China, the Vietnamese instructed Hun Sen to make important concessions. The SOC prime minister dropped his demands to make him vice-president of the Supreme National Council. Chinese premier Li Peng, who was satisfied that China had achieved most of its objectives in Cambodia and confident that Hun Sen would henceforth recognise China's regional authority, received the SOC prime minister in Beijing for an informal meeting. This was a milestone.[77]

Hun Sen nonetheless made a final demonstration of resistance in the last week of August 1991, when key participants of the Paris Conference convened for a four-day meeting in the Thai coastal town of Pattaya. The SOC prime minister accepted most aspects of the P5 plan but continued to argue that the full demobilisation of his army prior to elections would make his government and the entire country too reliant on the UN peacekeeping force for security in case of a Khmer Rouge offensive. He therefore proposed to disarm only 40 per cent of the faction's armed forces, with the rest placed under supervision for the peacekeeping force. The Khmer Rouge, however, tabled a counterproposal to reduce all faction's armies to a maximum strength of 10,000 troops. Eventually, a compromise was found around a French proposal to disarm and demobilise 70 per cent of the factions' forces and regroup the remaining 30 per cent under UN supervision. This would allow Phnom Penh continued numerical superiority against the Khmer Rouge. In return, Hun Sen dropped his demand to explicitly refer in the peace agreements to the crimes of the Pol Pot regime as "genocide." Washington protested against the compromise, and insisted to adopt the P5 plan unchanged, which prompted Sihanouk to complain that even the Khmer Rouge were being more flexible than the United States.[78] As other countries of the Paris Conference agreed to keep the armies at least partly intact as a safeguard against the Khmer Rouge, Washington eventually backed down. In Pattaya, the Cambodian factions agreed to a new cease-fire and the cessation of foreign arms supplies. Sihanouk was elected president of the SNC, providing him officially with a neutral position above the parties, as well as decision-making powers. This "Pattaya consensus" provided the blueprint for the final peace agreement.[79]

To avoid any more delays, copresidents France and Indonesia reconvened the Paris Conference on 23 October 1991 to get the deal done as quickly as possible. The delegations of

75 Peou, *Conflict Neutralization*, 44.
76 Ibid., 165.
77 Ross, "China and the Cambodian Peace Process," 1183.
78 Kiernan, "The Cambodian crisis," 15.
79 Brown and Zasloff, *Cambodia Confounds the Peacemakers*, 83; Brown, "Cambodia in 1991," 93.

nineteen countries returned to the Kléber conference centre two years, two months and five days after the failed conference of 1989. This time, it was a one-day conference with the sole aim to sign the peace accords.[80] After a long and rocky road, a settlement had been finally reached that aimed to end the endless conflict in Indochina. But the peace agreements were ratified in a sombre atmosphere. There was no joint celebration and no sign of rapprochement among the Cambodian factions. Igor Rogachev, the Soviet Union's director of Asian affairs, commented after the signing ceremony that the main objective was already accomplished before the first blue helmet set foot in Cambodia: ending the foreign support for the war.[81] The Paris Peace Agreements might have ended the Third Indochina War, but the Cambodian factions considered it as a continuation of their war by other means.[82] Major breakthroughs in the peace process had not been generated by a spirit of reconciliation, but by the great shifts in the geopolitical landscape in the final phase of the Cold War, which had enabled an unprecedented cooperation between the P5, who were all determined to sweep the embarrassing dossier off the table and "exit Indochina."[83] This is not to say, as Trevor Findlay has suggested, that there would have been no peace agreement if it had been left to the Cambodians themselves.[84] Rather, it must be argued that a peace agreement could have been achieved much earlier if the great powers had not insisted on a comprehensive political settlement that included the Khmer Rouge. A peace agreement between Hun Sen, Sihanouk and Son Sann, excluding the Khmer Rouge, supported by ASEAN and Vietnam was certainly conceivable. By insisting on a comprehensive political settlement, China, and particularly the United States, prevented a purely regional settlement, fearing that such a deal would be too beneficial to Vietnam and too detrimental to their own interests.

The great powers that had fuelled the war in Indochina to protect their strategic interests now enforced a peace agreement so they could redefine their relations in the post-Cold War world. For Beijing, the Paris Agreements ended the threat of Vietnamese hegemony in Indochina and allowed it to withdraw its support from the universally condemned Khmer Rouge in a face-saving way. But besides settling the long conflict between Hanoi and Beijing, the Cambodian peace settlement also marked a first step towards the normalisation of the complicated relation between the Washington and Hanoi. One could therefore argue that the Paris Conference on Cambodia was the second act of the Paris Conference of 1973 that ended the American involvement in Vietnam but failed to end the Second Indochina War. The Paris Accords of 1973 resulted in what historian Pierre Asselin has described as "a bitter peace." Bitter for Washington because it was defeated and failed to obtain a peace with honour, but also bitter for Hanoi as it was forced to accept the terms of the agreement under pressure of a relentless American bombing campaign as well as the recalibration of great power relations (Soviet-American détente and the Sino-American

80 Symbolic for the dominance of the United States in the decision-making process was the fact the French planned to convene the conference on 31 October 1991 because this was Sihanouk's birthday. But Washington insisted on 23 October, because of the availability of Secretary of State James Baker. Sihanouk initially refused the 23rd because the oracles advised against it, but eventually, the Americans got their way. Roland Dumas, *Le fil et la pelote: mémoires* (Paris: Plon, 1996), 444.
81 Becker, *When the war was over*, 507.
82 Strangio, *Cambodia: From Pol Pot to Hun Sen*, 45; Becker, *When the war was over*, 506; Martin, *La diplomatie*, 647.
83 Solomon, *Exiting Indochina*, 76.
84 Findlay, *Cambodia*, 17.

rapprochement) which resulted in "betrayal" by Beijing and Moscow.[85] In 1991, the cards were different. The United States, emerging from the Cold War as the dominant power, was in a much stronger position than Hanoi. This time, it was not the destructive stick of aerial bombardments that pressured Hanoi to accept the terms of the peace agreement, it was the attractive carrot of access to global trade markets and the World Bank. Asselin argued that the 1973 Paris Accords were bound to unravel for the reason that, during the negotiations, finalising a peace agreement was considered more important than achieving peace itself.[86] This was also the case in 1991. Achieving a comprehensive political settlement was vital for the redefinition of great power relations, while shaping the conditions for a sustainable peace among Cambodians was clearly of secondary importance. The hot potato of making peace among the Cambodian factions was handed over to the United Nations. Steven Ratner, the legal advisor to the US delegation to the Paris Conference later observed: "after the signature of the Paris Accords, most states viewed Cambodia as 'the UN's problem', which essentially meant the Secretary-General's problem."[87] Many UN member states, especially in the West, recalibrated their focus on the crises in the former Yugoslavia and Somalia, which would have harmful consequences for the course of the operation in Cambodia.

A fragile peace

As the Paris Peace Agreement was more a settlement among foreign powers than among Cambodians, it constituted a fragile basis for peace. Michael Haas has argued that the model of a "comprehensive political settlement" did not correspond to the "Asian way" of diplomacy, which proceeds step-by-step, instead of seeking a blueprint.[88] Other Cambodia experts observed at the time that the Paris Agreements favoured the Khmer Rouge for several reasons. First, it gave breathing space to its army which had been forced into the defensive on the battlefield. Second, it allowed them access to the national political arena without abandoning their military options. Third, the peace agreement explicitly prohibited that individual members of the Khmer Rouge could be tried before a tribunal for genocide.[89] It was hoped by the P5 that the inclusion of the Khmer Rouge in the peace settlement would lure them out of the jungle and into the political arena which would ultimately lead to their marginalisation. But Cambodia watchers warned that the Khmer Rouge hadn't changed and were determined to reconquer the country, combining political and militarily means.[90]

Prince Sihanouk returned to Phnom Penh on 14 November 1991, after a period of fourteen years in exile. Prime Minister Hun Sen escorted the prince from the airport to the

85 Pierre Asselin, *A Bitter Peace: Washington, Hanoi, and the making of the Paris Agreement* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 165; Lien-Hang T. Nguyen, *Hanoi's War: An International History of the War for Peace in Vietnam* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 311.

86 Asselin, *A Bitter Peace*, xi.

87 Ratner, *The New UN Peacekeeping*, 161.

88 Michael Haas, *Cambodia, Pol Pot, and the United States: The Faustian Pact* (New York: Praeger 1991), 124–25.

89 Klintworth, "Cambodia 1992: Hopes Fading," 113–29; Raoul M. Jennar, *Chroniques Cambodgiennes 1990–1994* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1995) 117, 199; Vickery, *Cambodia: A Political Survey*, 10; Kiernan, "The Cambodian crisis," 114; Roberts, *Political Transition in Cambodia*, 38; Abdulgaffar Peang-Meth, "The United Nations Peace Plan, the Cambodian Conflict, and the Future of Cambodia," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 14, no.1 (June 1992): 44.

90 Christophe Peschoux, "Masque et réalité du mouvement Khmer Rouge," *Le Monde Diplomatique*, June 1991; Jennar, *Chroniques Cambodgiennes*, 115–212; Nayan Chanda, "Pol Pot's Plan for Survival," *The Wall Street Journal,* 16 September 1991; Kiernan, "The Cambodian crisis," 6.

royal palace in a white 1963 Chevrolet Impala convertible, a symbol that reminded of the era in which Cambodia had been at peace for the last time. Both men triumphantly waved to the cheering crowd holding flags of the Supreme National Council, UN-blue with a white silhouette of Cambodia.[91] The scene was magnificent and symbolised the hope for peace in Cambodia. But Sihanouk was well aware that the conflict in his country was far from settled. In his first speech on Cambodian soil, the prince explicitly pointed out that the Cambodians were forced by foreign powers to accept the return of the Khmer Rouge.[92]

By insisting on a comprehensive political agreement, the great powers determined that the UN peacekeeping operation in Cambodia would be an all-embracing enterprise. Scholars have generally argued that UNTAC was the most ambitious peacekeeping effort ever attempted by the United Nations because of the complicated and multifaceted nature of its mandate. This might be true, but the biggest challenge was undoubtedly the fact that this ambitious plan had been imposed by the great powers on the Cambodian factions who had only a superficial interest in reconciliation. As is the case with many negotiated settlements, the Paris Peace Agreements were both detailed and ambiguous. The Paris Peace Agreement did not spell out the consequences for disrespecting it, there was no build-in sanctioning mechanism in case one of the parties would not live up to its obligations under the agreement, as Japan had proposed. It did not offer a credible threat of punishment, a good balance of carrots and sticks, which according to international relations scholar Monica Toft is an essential ingredient for a negotiated settlement that aims to end a civil war and build enduring peace.[93] The American diplomat and Indochina-expert Frederick Brown observed at the time that the agreement could only bring peace to Cambodia if UNTAC would be ready to take "firm actions" and if the special representative would make "extraordinarily wise interpretations" of his mandate.[94] But Yasushi Akashi was only appointed as special representative two months after the peace agreement was signed, and officially started his function as head of UNTAC five months later. In the meantime, a small UN advance mission (UNAMIC) was sent to Cambodia to fill this large gap and keep the fragile peace.

91 Cambacérès, *Norodom Sihanouk*, 319.
92 Kiernan, "The Cambodian crisis," 23.
93 Monica Duffy Toft, "Ending Civil Wars: A Case for Rebel Victory?," *International Security* 34, no. 4 (Spring 2010): 8.
94 Brown, "Cambodia in 1991: An Uncertain Peace," 91.

From left to right: Khieu Samphan (Democratic Kampuchea or Khmer Rouge), Son Sann (KPNLF), Prince Norodom Sihanouk (FUNCINPEC), French foreign minister Roland Dumas, and Hun Sen (State of Cambodia), before starting talks on 25 July 1989 in La Celle Saint Cloud in preparation of the Paris Peace Conference from 30 July to 30 August 1989.
Photo credit: Agence France Presse / Voice of America.