



Universiteit  
Leiden  
The Netherlands

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

Stam, W.

### Citation

Stam, W. (2023, October 18). *The imperative of success: United Nations Peacekeeping in Cambodia (1991-1993)*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3645875>

Version: Publisher's Version

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3645875>

**Note:** To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

# In defence of the mission

# 5

When UNTAC entered the year 1993, the prospects for the mission to succeed were gloomy. The conditions that were considered as an absolute prerequisite by the Paris Agreements for the organisation of free and fair elections were not in place. With the Khmer Rouge becoming increasingly aggressive and the other parties less cooperative, it is striking that, eventually UNTAC did succeed in organising the elections, allowing the UN to declare the mission a success when leaving Cambodia by the end of September. In exploring how UNTAC succeeded in achieving this final outcome, this chapter challenges the conventional wisdom that the success was in large measure the result of complete adherence to the peacekeeping principles. Peacekeepers are supposed to be soldiers without enemies, but as the Khmer Rouge became unmistakably UNTAC's adversary, the operation changed into a robust force that relied heavily on the State of Cambodia to defend the mission and safeguard its success as well as the reputation of the United Nations. UNTAC might have attempted to keep up the appearance of an impartial peacekeeping force, but the imperative of success for the UN led to a more liberal interpretation of the mandate and the understanding that there could be no success without adopting a stronger military posture and taking more risks.

## Increased military readiness

Media coverage about the UN operation in Cambodia became increasingly critical in early 1993, and public confidence in UNTAC was at an all-time low.<sup>1</sup> The most expensive operation in the history of the UN, reporters wrote, was on the verge of collapse and had achieved hardly anything of its mandate, except for the successful repatriations of refugees under the imaginative leadership of Sérgio Vieira de Mello. This was an impressive achievement, but also strongly facilitated by the fact that the Cambodian refugees were more than willing to return to their homeland and the Khmer Rouge had an interest in receiving them in their territories. Stories in the media about peacekeepers spending more time in bars and brothels than fulfilling their mission of disarming the Cambodian factions further undermined UNTAC's credibility. As is the case with practically any peacekeeping operation, the quality of the national contingents differed strongly. A large number of the infantry battalions was well-trained and disciplined. There were Malaysian Royal Rangers, Indonesian Para-Raiders, the French Foreign Legion, and the Royal Netherlands Marine Corps. But other contingents were much less trained and equipped. Some of the units, in

1 See for example: Gary Klintworth, "United Nations: A Poor Job in Cambodia," *International Herald Tribune*, 2 February 1993; Nate Thayer and Nayan Chanda, "Shattered peace," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 11 February 1993, 11; Al Santoli, "Cambodia Needs a More Potent U.N. Presence," *The Asian Wall Street Journal*, 10 February 1993; Victor Mallet, "UN soldiers fast losing popularity in the killing fields," *The Straits Times*, 19 February 1993; "UN soldiers fail to pacify the killing fields," *Financial Times*, 11 February 1993; René Backmann, "Cambodge: si les sauveteurs front naufrage," *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 19 March 1993, 42–44; Henry Kamm, "Cambodia Election Snared as Peace Pact Unravels," *The New York Times*, 18 March 1993; Henry Kamm, "The UN and Cambodia: Fading Hopes," *International Herald Tribune*, 19 March 1993.

Sanderson's words, "came with their backsides hanging out of their trousers."<sup>2</sup> With the faltering disarmament process, many blue helmets had simply too much time on their hands and too much money to spend, which led to some serious disciplinary problems. Complaints mostly included drunkenness, disrespect vis-à-vis the Cambodian population, sexual harassment of Cambodian women and reckless driving in UN vehicles, regularly causing lethal accidents in a country where the previously abandoned roads were suddenly invaded by brand-new white SUVs. The battalion from Bulgaria, deployed to the provinces of Kandal and Kompong Speu, was notorious and caused most incidents, including street races with UN cars.<sup>3</sup> There was also a strong rise in prostitution and HIV in the country.<sup>4</sup> UNTAC acknowledged the problem and promised to set up a special office to handle complaints of sexual harassment, but Akashi was criticised for making things worse by untactfully defending the right for some entertainment and relaxation of "hotblooded eighteen-year-old soldiers who have come out of a difficult three-week mission in the jungle."<sup>5</sup> This statement further contributed to a negative portrayal of Akashi in the press, where he was often depicted as indecisive and soft.<sup>6</sup>

In January 1993, the comprehensive political settlement of the Paris Agreement was practically dead, and UNTAC's new mission became limited to holding elections and put a legitimate government in place. Prince Sihanouk criticised the UN for proceeding with the elections despite its failure to disarm the factions' armies, saying nonetheless that he would continue to support the UN mission, "because that is the best means of getting rid of UNTAC."<sup>7</sup> Some UNTAC staffers talking to journalists off the record also expressed their discomfort with what they observed as a strategy of "bluff[ing] our way through to elections, claim victory for the UN, and get out."<sup>8</sup> With

---

2 Power, *Chasing the Flame*, 92.

3 Sofia had certainly not sent its best soldiers, but had instead recruited volunteers, some of them even being ex-convicts who had received no more than two months of basic military training. Moreover, a few weeks after their deployment, many Bulgarian soldiers threatened to leave the country complaining that they had not received their full salaries from their government nor adequate food. The UN Secretariat considered to completely cancel the Bulgarian contribution to the mission, but Bulgarian promises to send professional soldiers were eventually accepted out of fear for negative publicity. By December 1992, fifty-six members of the Bulgarian battalion, including eight officers, were sent home for disciplinary reasons. Sheri Prasso, "Poorly paid Bulgarian peacekeepers threaten to leave Cambodia," *AFP*, 12 July 1992; Lolke van der Heide, "Sofia stuurde criminelen als blauwhelmen naar Cambodja," *NRC Handelsblad*, 19 March 1993; Heining, *Peacekeeping in Transition*, 76; Findlay, *Cambodia*, 139; "An Open Letter to Yasushi Akashi," *The Phnom Penh Post*, 11 October 1992.

4 Sandra Whitworth, *Men, Militarism, and UN peacekeeping: a gendered analysis* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2004) 62; At the hospital of Preah Vihear, in the sector of the Pakistani battalion, the majority of patients were young boys who were the victim of sexual abuse by UN soldiers. Cited in: Raoul M. Jennar, "l'ONU au Cambodge: les leçons de l'APRONUC," *Revue Études internationales*, 26, no. 2 (June 1995): 312. This is confirmed by other accounts. See: Guillaume Ancel, *Un casque bleu chez les Khmers rouges: Journal d'un soldat de paix, Cambodge 1992* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2021), 209. Similar abuses were observed by the Dutch battalion commander Patrick Cammaert in the adjacent sector where he took over the camp from the Bangladeshi battalion. See: Esther Bootsma, *Kijk niet weg: De missie van generaal Patrick Cammaert* (Amersfoort: Atlas Contact, 2019), 83.

5 "Speech by UNTAC Head of Mission Yasushi Akashi at UNTAC headquarters (1992)," accessed on Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ikgSjYa-0N4>; William Branigin, "Key Phases of U.N. Peace Operation In Cambodia Seen Breaking Down," *The Washington Post*, 4 October 1992; Akashi justified his remarks by saying: "I had to defend our soldiers. The behaviour of a very small minority should not colour people's perception of UNTAC as a whole." See: James Pringle, "Sex and inflation end the UN honeymoon in Cambodia," *The Times*, 26 November 1992; Sara Colm, "U.N. Agrees to Address Sexual Harassment Issue," *The Phnom Penh Post*, 11 October 1992

6 Victor Mallet, "UN soldiers fail to pacify the killing fields," *Financial Times*, 11 February 1993; "UN soldiers fast losing popularity in the killing fields," *The Strait Times*, 19 February 1993.

7 Nayan Chanda, "Sharp words," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 4 February 1993, 23.

8 Nate Thayer, "Moaners beware: Harassed UN reacts to negative press assessments," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 5 November 1992, 27.

media reporting increasingly critical, UNTAC's relationship with the press deteriorated. Akashi was annoyed by what he viewed as the mediocre quality of sensation-seeking journalists and issued a directive that forbade UN staff to talk to the press without prior permission. UNTAC even tried to reassign journalists because of their negative reporting on Cambodia.<sup>9</sup> But critical assessments of the situation were broadly shared among reporters – including those working for the world's major news agencies and newspapers – as well as by other observers. A delegation of French senators visiting Cambodia in late February concluded in their extensive report that UNTAC was failing in its mission and that the danger for renewed civil war was real. The senators observed that the UN bureaucracy in New York was clearly unsuited to lead such a large operation and that the UNTAC leadership also fell short. They predicted that the general elections in May would probably not bring peace to Cambodia but was likely to result in a division of the country in two zones, one held by the new government, the other by the Khmer Rouge, which would amount to the continuation of civil war.<sup>10</sup> Cambodia academics Ben Kiernan, Raoul Jennar and Serge Thion made similar analyses and argued that the objective to restore peace was slipping farther out of sight.<sup>11</sup> Mats Berdal and Gerald Segal also considered that UNTAC was on the verge of failure and that a renewed civil war and “a wider war in Indochina” could not be excluded.<sup>12</sup>

The consequence of the Security Council's decision to push through with the elections was that the military component retained its full strength, instead of being reduced from 15,000 to 5,000, as had been planned after the successful completion of the disarmament and demobilisation process. As the role of the military component changed into supporting UNTAC's ultimate political objective, Sanderson's capacities as a military planner became an important asset. He quickly recognised that the organisation of elections in such a complicated environment required a level of detailed planning for which the civilian components of the mission were insufficiently prepared. Historian Brocades Zaalberg has demonstrated how Sanderson increased his control over the plan-making in the overall operation, in what the chief military planner jokingly described as a “military coup.” In early December 1992, the force commander proposed to make his military planning staff responsible for the planning of the entire operation in order to enhance the coordination between the military component, the electoral and the information and education branch. Akashi and the civilian components reluctantly agreed to making the military component the de-facto integrator and driving force behind UNTAC as a whole. In practice, however, the arrangement only partially functioned as the civilian components were not eager to have the military take over.<sup>13</sup>

The objective of disarmament and cantonment of the factions was practically abandoned, and all efforts of the military component focussed on the creation of a secure environment conducive to the preparations for and conduct of an election in Cambodia. On 9 December,

---

9 Phnom Penh correspondents' association, statement by Mr Akashi, September 1993, UNA, S-0794-0036-0004.

10 André Bettencourt, Claude Estier, Paul Caron, Paul d'Ornano, *Rapport d'information fait au nom de la commission des affaires étrangères, de la défense et des forces armées à la suite d'une mission effectuée au Cambodge et au Vietnam du 26 février au 9 mars 1993*, Rapport du Sénat français, no. 268 (21 April 1993) 33–35.

11 Kiernan, “The Failure of the Paris Agreement,” 7–19; Serge Thion, “Failure in Cambodia,” *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 21 January 1993, 28; “Cambodia expert says war inevitable,” *The Times*, 6 February 1993.

12 Gerald Segal and Mats Berdal, “A Cambodia Failure Would Hurt the UN Everywhere,” *International Herald Tribune*, 12 January 1993.

13 Brocades Zaalberg, *Soldiers and Civil Power*, 129–30.

Sanderson signed the order to redeploy his battalions from the zones designed to accommodate cantonment to new zones that corresponded as much as possible to the administrative provinces of the country. This facilitated the use of the military component to assist the electoral process. “We made the decision that regardless of what the factions did to themselves, we and the Cambodian people would get on with the conduct of the elections,” Sanderson told a reporter in January 1993.<sup>14</sup> This decision was described by William Shawcross in a *Time* magazine article as “the UN’s biggest gamble.”<sup>15</sup> It was a gamble the UN was also taking at the time in Angola, where UNAVEM II decided to proceed with the organisation of elections despite the fact that it had been unable to disarm and demobilise the warring armies that continued to violate the cease-fire. Although the national elections in November 1992 proceeded reasonably smoothly and were considered to be generally free and fair, the gamble eventually backfired. Days after the election, the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) refused to accept the election results, and the country plunged back into civil war, whereafter the UN withdrew most of its personnel.<sup>16</sup>

Sanderson realised that for Cambodia it was a risky strategy as well, because he knew that if the Khmer Rouge would decide to militarily oppose the elections from occurring, UNTAC did not have “the means nor the mandate” to confront such a threat.<sup>17</sup> He therefore considered that the best approach was to leave the Khmer Rouge isolated in their zones and avoid provoking them. But the force commander also understood that if UNTAC would not enter contentious areas – meaning areas falling outside the zones that were fully controlled by any faction – its ability to conduct the elections in these parts of the country would be endangered, which risked to further crumble the already rapidly decreasing confidence of the Cambodian people in UNTAC. The force commander therefore instructed his sector commanders to push as far as they could into these contested areas to protect the civilian election teams doing their work there, accepting the risk that this might create incidents with the Khmer Rouge.<sup>18</sup> Whereas Sanderson had previously been unwilling to take the risk to send his forces into zones of potential danger and territories of combat, he now believed that the clear political purpose of achieving the elections justified the risk of moving into the areas where the Khmer Rouge was active. He later recalled: “UNTAC continued to push into the countryside. It was risky, but it had to be done.”<sup>19</sup>

How risky it was to operate in these contested areas became clear when UNTAC suffered its first fatalities on 12 January. A group of forty unidentified armed men committed a coordinated attack on the houses of civilian UNTAC personnel in the village of Angkrom in Siem Reap province, killing two Cambodian women working for the electoral component, as well as a seven-year-old child. Two UNTAC police officers, from India and Ghana, were badly injured.<sup>20</sup> The incident especially made the Japanese government very nervous since five unarmed Japanese civilian police officers were also stationed at the UNTAC post, but coincidentally had been off-base when the

---

14 Harish Mehta, “Caught in the Cambodian crossfire - Lt-Gen Sanderson interview,” *Business Times Singapore*, 15 January 1993.

15 William Shawcross, “Cambodia: The U.N.’s Biggest Gamble,” *Time*, 28 December 1992, 14–20.

16 Ratner, *The New UN Peacekeeping*, 132.

17 Cable Sanderson to Goulding, 7 January 1993, “PDK policy towards electoral process,” UNA, S-0794-0021-0001.

18 Ibid.

19 Lieutenant General J.M. Sanderson, “UNTAC: Successes and Failures,” in *International peacekeeping: building on the Cambodian experience*, ed. Hugh Smith (1994), 21.

20 “Attack on UNTAC electoral workers, statement by Mr. Akashi,” 13 January 1992, UNA, S-1829-0312-0001.

attack occurred.<sup>21</sup> After these first casualties, UNTAC headquarters emphasised to all units that they had the authority to respond with force if they were harassed or even hindered in executing their mission. Peacekeepers operating near the Khmer Rouge-controlled areas were instructed to adopt “a committed military posture” when escorting members of UNTAC’s civilian components, which included fully armed convoys equipped with heavy machine guns.<sup>22</sup> Sanderson recognised that it was necessary to increase UNTAC’s military readiness, but the detention of large numbers of UNTAC personnel in December had dealt a blow to the credibility of UNTAC as a whole, and especially of the military component’s ability to protect the elections. The deterrent capacities of UNTAC battalions varied considerably. The Dutch and the French were clearly the best equipped contingents possessing a large number of vehicles, night-vision equipment, and their own helicopters. They were therefore able to act robustly.<sup>23</sup> This was demonstrated on 4 January 1993, when thirty Khmer Rouge fighters opened fire on a French compound. Local villagers who had rushed to the French camp for protection witnessed how the foreign legionnaires returned fire effectively, forcing the Khmer Rouge to flee.<sup>24</sup> Cambodia academic Christophe Peschoux was present during the incident and witnessed how the French riposte strengthened local villagers’ confidence in UNTAC.<sup>25</sup> Some commanders of other battalions, however, voiced concern about their new mission to protect the electoral process, lacking even the ammunition for target practicing.<sup>26</sup> Sanderson therefore requested New York to pressure troop contributing countries to organise special resupply flights to Cambodia to level-up ammunition, weapons, spare parts, medical supplies, and night vision equipment of their contingents.<sup>27</sup> UNTAC began to prepare for more violent scenarios.

### **Building a local peace: improvisation and pacification**

Apart from the limited disarmament of the forces of the three cooperating factions, UNTAC’s eleven infantry battalions were unable to execute their main mission. However, by improvisation and design, peacekeepers became involved in other activities than their original mission prescribed. First, the military component became actively involved in providing security for UNTAC’s electoral workers. Since the arrival of its first personnel in the spring of 1992, the electoral component had worked quietly on the background to lay the groundwork for the elections. On 5 October, the voter registration process started, first in Phnom Penh, and then in the rest of the country, where 450 highly qualified and motivated but poorly paid United Nations Volunteers (UNVs) recruited

---

21 “Siem Reap attack worries Japan,” *The Nation*, 15 January 1993.

22 Message UNTAC HQ to all battalions, 18 January 1993, “Use of force,” UNA, S-0794-0020-0002.

23 Coulon, *Soldiers of Diplomacy*, 50; Author’s interview with Jeff Mac Mootry; “La ‘croisade’ du Colonel Irastorza,” *Armée & Défense* (July 1992).

24 Journal de Marche et Opérations du Bataillon Français au Cambodge du 29 Novembre 1992 au 17 Juin 1993 APRONUC – Secteur 6, Service Historique de la Défense Vincennes (SHD), GR 2000 Z 114 5.

25 Interoffice memorandum Peschoux to Carney, 27 January 1993, “Report on a visit to Kampot,” ADN, 521 POI/231.

26 Cable Sanderson to Goulding, 17 November 1992, “Planning for redeployment of UNTAC to support the electoral process,” UNA, S-1829-0312-0005.

27 Cable Sanderson to Goulding, 26 November 1992, “Brief to contributing countries UNTAC,” UNA, S-0795-0043-0004; Cable Sanderson to Goulding, 17 November 1992, “Planning for redeployment of UNTAC to support the electoral process,” UNA, S-1829-0312-0005; Cable Sanderson to Goulding, 26 November 1992, “Brief to contributing countries UNTAC,” UNA, S-0795-0043-0004.



some 4,000 Cambodians and trained them in registration techniques. In small teams of five they travelled around Cambodia, with the aim to register the eligible Cambodian population for the elections. Living in precarious conditions, the UNVs demonstrated great courage by visiting the most remote villages. Sanderson instructed the military component to provide these teams with protection and logistic support especially in the contentious zones that were difficult to access and close to the Khmer Rouge.<sup>28</sup> With help from the Indonesian battalion, UNTAC election teams even succeeded in registering a large part of the population in the unstable province of Kompong Thom. By the end of January 1993, UNTAC's electoral component had managed to register over 4.7 million Cambodian voters, which constituted 96 per cent of the eligible population in the parts of the country to which UNTAC had access. It was encouraging that many Cambodians were visibly proud of their personal voting cards issued to them.<sup>29</sup>

A week after it had finished its work of voter registration, UNTAC's electoral component, assisted by the Information and Education branch, initiated its civic education campaign through which it prepared the Cambodian population for the elections, to be held in the last week of May, through education programmes. UN volunteers travelled from village to village to give the Cambodian population explanation about the workings of democratic elections, using materials such as comics on posters and leaflets, but also videos and moving theatres. The most important message to convey was that their vote would be secret and that they should not be intimidated by threats from either the Khmer Rouge not to vote or from the State of Cambodia to vote for them.

Apart from providing security for electoral workers in contested areas, peacekeepers also actively assisted their efforts, for instance with the distribution of flyers and pinning up of posters in the villages with information about the elections.<sup>30</sup> The French battalion created a special platoon with Khmer-speakers that travelled around the countryside to reassure the local population and inform them about the elections. The platoon generally stayed one week in a village during which it set up a health clinic and a school where Cambodian children were given the opportunity to follow French language classes.<sup>31</sup> Some observers saw the French peacekeepers applying some elements of the colonial counterinsurgency methods that had been used to pacify the countryside in French Indochina, which was based on a creeping occupation, using the analogy of an oil stain (*tâche d'huile*) spreading out progressively over a wider area using military, political and economic means.<sup>32</sup> "Peace is not created from top-down, but from bottom-up," French battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Elrick Irastorza, said when sharing with a journalist his belief that if tensions in the countryside could be eased, it would help to solve the political stalemate in

---

28 Dukers, "Peace-keeping in Cambodja," 2854; Brocades Zaalberg *Soldiers and Civil Power*, 127; Jennar, "Cambodge: l'entreprise inachevée," 58.

29 "Mariniers in Cambodja: zorgen voor veilige verkiezingen," *Defensiekrant*, 10 December 1992.

30 Brocades Zaalberg, *Soldiers and Civil Power*, 98.

31 Barbara Smith, "French battalion aids locals in sector 6," *The Cambodia Times*, 5–11 October 1992; Rémi Favret, "Cambodge: la « petite paix » des villages," *Le Figaro*, 19 August 1992; APRONUC distribution de tracts, 92.9.014 - K7-13, ECPAD.

32 *Le Monde*-journalist Patrice de Beer observed that the French applied a method similar to the one developed by French Marshal Hubert Lyautey, who together with Marshal Joseph Gallieni, had "pacified" French Indochina (and other parts of the French colonial empire) in the late nineteenth century. Patrice de Beer, "Cambodge: la visite de M. Pierre Joxe aux « casques bleus » français, l'armée humanitaire," *Le Monde*, 2 October 1992. For a detailed analysis of the Gallieni-Lyautey method, see: Michael P. M. Finch, *A Progressive Occupation?: The Gallieni-Lyautey Method and Colonial Pacification in Tonkin and Madagascar, 1885–1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

Phnom Penh. In contrast to the “political peace” that was prolapsing, Irastorza ordered his men to build what he called *une petite paix locale*, a local peace in the Cambodian villages and rice paddies.<sup>33</sup>

In order to build a local peace, it was necessary for UNTAC military forces to control their zones and protect the local population, tasks that were hardly considered to belong to the realm of peacekeepers in the early 1990s.<sup>34</sup> Although methods and motivation differed between the battalions, by actively patrolling their sector, sometimes even jointly with various factions’ members, the security around the Cambodian countryside was significantly improved.<sup>35</sup> As Brocades Zaalberg has demonstrated, the Dutch battalion became heavily involved in public security duties in their sector.<sup>36</sup> The main security problem in most parts of Cambodia was created by armed groups who used their weapons as an easy way to make money, often by forcing the local traffic to pay “road taxes.” Although their mandate did officially not provide for it, Dutch marines ignored protestations from UNTAC headquarters, and decided to disarm local bandits on the spot. They took the initiative to make it obligatory for all armed soldiers of the factions to carry ID-cards and a proper uniform in order to distinguish them from the bandits.<sup>37</sup> The French battalion adopted similar policies and succeeded in completely eradicating the racketeering on the mains roads in their sector. This improvement of the security environment allowed Cambodian farmers to work on their fields and go to the local marketplaces.<sup>38</sup>

Bottom-up improvised initiatives by individual UNTAC units that went against official instructions were also central in efforts to provide medical aid to the local population in a country where medical facilities were very scarce. The UN Secretariat in New York opposed giving medical care to Cambodians as to preserve medical supplies which were normally exclusively reserved for UNTAC personnel.<sup>39</sup> But well-equipped Western contingents ignored these official UN instructions and used 85 per cent of their medical services to the benefit of the Cambodian population.<sup>40</sup> Doctors of the French battalion rehabilitated an old hospital in Sihanoukville, equipped it with an x-ray facility, a laboratory and an operating room. Nearly as much as a hundred operations per month were carried out, whereas this was only three per month before UNTAC arrived in the country.<sup>41</sup> German military doctors in Phnom Penh also insisted on treating any Cambodians who presented themselves. The German and Japanese governments sent additional medical supplies and funds that allowed the German hospital to treat up to 17,000 Cambodian patients. It soon became known among the Cambodian population as “the House of the Helping Gods.” Indian army doctors also treated dozens of Cambodians for tuberculosis at their field

---

33 Favret, “la « petite paix » des villages”; Smith, “French battalion aids locals”; “La croisade.”

34 Thijs Brocades Zaalberg, “Counterinsurgency and peace operations,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Insurgency and Counterinsurgency*, eds. Paul B. Rich and Isabelle Duyvesteyn (New York: Routledge, 2014), 85.

35 Michael Doyle observed that some battalions were ineffective but that most were “very good.” Doyle, *UNTAC’s Civil Mandate*, 63

36 Brocades Zaalberg, *Soldiers and Civil Power*, 103–14.

37 Author’s interview with H. Dukers; Weekly sitrep nr 003 12–19 December 1992, NIMH, UNTAC-099, file 68.

38 Smith, “French battalion aids locals”; Favret, “la « petite paix » des villages”; Message Major Van Ede to Dutch HQ Sisophon, 4 September 1992, “optreden tegen banditisme Cambodja,” SIB, MARSTAF, box 1236, file 43.

39 Dukers, “Peace-keeping in Cambodja,” 2853; Author’s Interview with Herman Dukers.

40 Commandement de la doctrine, *l’intervention française au Cambodge*, 61; Brocades Zaalberg, *Soldiers and Civil Power*, 97.

41 Commandement de la doctrine, *l’intervention française au Cambodge*, 70; Smith, “French battalion aids locals.”



hospital in Siem Reap.<sup>42</sup> It was partly because of the initial prohibition by UN headquarters to receive the local population that UNTACs doctors and medics could treat only 27 per cent of all Cambodians seeking medical attention.<sup>43</sup>

Besides UNTAC's engineer contingents from Thailand, Japan, China and France that worked hard to repair roads and bridges, most UNTAC infantry battalions also initiated small bottom-up initiatives to improve the infrastructure and the lives of the Cambodian population in their sector. The Dutch marines received half a million dollars from their government to set up development projects, which they used to build fifteen new schools, several nurseries and orphanages, a police station and a prison. Some fifty deep water wells were drilled, a malaria prevention programme was set up and crutches for Cambodian mine victims purchased.<sup>44</sup> The Dutch immediately observed that these "civic action" projects, as they were called, created goodwill and confidence among the Cambodian population.<sup>45</sup> The same was true for the French battalion, where each company was ordered to carry out at least one civic action project every month.<sup>46</sup> "I felt more like a construction worker than a soldier," an Irish foreign legionnaire remembered about his time in Cambodia.<sup>47</sup>

Battalions with less financial and logistical means also found ways to set up civic action projects. The Malaysian battalion located in Battambang province, for example, had a civic action budget of only \$6,650 which was essentially used for road fixing activities, English language training, public health information campaigns and the construction of sanitary infrastructure.<sup>48</sup> The Bangladeshi battalion undertook low cost initiatives such as teaching the local population efficient farming techniques and starting up a revenue-generating programme for Cambodian land-mine victims.<sup>49</sup> The members of the second – more professional – Bulgarian battalion partly repaired the bad reputation of their predecessors by constructing schools and providing medical aid to the Cambodians.<sup>50</sup> The leadership of both UNHCR and UNDP in Phnom Penh were impressed by the work of the military component.<sup>51</sup>

Besides improving the living conditions of the Cambodian population, bottom-up civic action activities were also important for improving the morale of the peacekeepers as it gave them a sense of purpose in a country ridden with poverty in which they were unable to satisfactorily fulfil their mission. Brocades Zaalberg has pointed out that there was nonetheless some confusion over

---

42 Ralf Vollmuth, "UNTAC 1992/93 Der deutsche Sanitätsdienst in Kambodscha," *Zeitschrift für historische Bildung*, 2 (2018), 18–21; Mallet, "UN soldiers fast losing popularity in the killing fields."

43 Robin Davies, "Civic action in Cambodia: the role of UNTAC (United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia)," *Forced Migration Review*, no. 23 (January–April 1997).

44 Brocades Zaalberg, *Soldiers and Civil Power*, 101; Mieke Kooistra, "Ministers vinden Untac zinvol voor ontwikkeling Cambodja," 14 September 1992; Relus ter Beek, *Manoeuvres: herinneringen aan Plein 4* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Balans, 1996), 117; Verslag van het werkbezoek van de Inspecteur-Generaal der Krijgsmacht aan Cambodja van 26 december 1992 tot 11 januari 1993, SIB, MARSTAF, UNTAC, box 1232, file 24; Cable Netherlands Embassy Bangkok to The Hague, 16 March 1993, "Defensie ontwikkelingsprojecten Kambodja," AMBZ, BZ-00169; Bais, *Het mijnenveld van een vredesmacht*, 95.

45 Verslag van het werkbezoek van de Inspecteur-Generaal der Krijgsmacht aan Cambodja van 26 december 1992 tot 11 januari 1993, SIB, MARSTAF, UNTAC, box 1232, file 24.

46 Michael Hayes, "With a Little Help From the Troops," *Phnom Penh Post*, 23 April 1993.

47 Padraig O'Keeffe and Ralph Riegel, *Hidden soldier: An Irish Legionnaire's Wars from Bosnia to Iraq* (New York: The O'Brien Press, 2013), 45.

48 Heininger, *Peacekeeping in transition*, 122.

49 Davies, "Civic action in Cambodia"; Bais, *Het mijnenveld van een vredesmacht*, 96.

50 Van der Heide, "Sofia stuurde criminelen als blauwhelmen naar Cambodja."

51 Bais, *Het mijnenveld van een vredesmacht*, 93.

the purpose of civic action because it was not always clear whether these activities of relief and reconstruction were a purpose of its own or whether “doing good” was a means of winning the hearts and minds of the population and thus facilitate UNTAC’s military operations.<sup>52</sup> It seems, however, that this confusion disappeared as soon UNTAC’s mission became fully focussed on the protection of the elections, when civic action activities became a central instrument to enhance UNTAC’s credibility with the Cambodian population and compete with the Khmer Rouge for their hearts and minds.

Sanderson wholeheartedly supported the bottom-up civic action initiatives of some of his battalions. He himself had gained experience with civic action while serving in Malaya in the 1960s, and was an admirer of Sir Gerald Templer, the commander of the British forces during the Malayan Emergency of 1948–60, who had famously argued that the answer to the insurgency was not to pour more troops into the jungle, but to “win the hearts and minds of the people.”<sup>53</sup> Templer’s hearts and minds approach, which included psychological warfare and the construction of schools and medical clinics, is generally presented as an effective counterinsurgency method which successfully extinguished the insurrection. Some scholars, however, have nuanced this picture by pointing at the fact that the British also used high levels of coercion and force in Malaya.<sup>54</sup> Sanderson had enhanced his knowledge in this domain in the 1970s when he taught courses in counter-revolutionary warfare and peacekeeping operations at the British Staff College Camberley.<sup>55</sup> Before he took on command in Cambodia, Sanderson had asked the UN Secretariat to provide the military component with a special budget for civic action. But much to his regret, New York did not believe that civic action belonged to the realm of the military, and should be left to UNTAC’s rehabilitation component which fell under the responsibility of the UN agencies UNDP, UNHCR and UNICEF.<sup>56</sup> Sanderson strongly deplored that New York did not understand that many parts of the Cambodian countryside were only accessible by the military.<sup>57</sup> During the first eleven months of the operation, UNTAC’s civic action activities relied on improvised initiatives by individual battalions. But with the elections approaching and the Khmer Rouge’s insurgency growing, UNTAC began to employ the hearts and minds approach more systematically to combat the Khmer Rouge’s influence over the Cambodian population. On 17 March 1993, two months before the elections, Sanderson created a special civic action cell at UNTAC headquarters to stimulate all contingents to engage in hearts and minds activities in order to forge ties with the local community before having to focus all attention on the security of the elections.<sup>58</sup> All battalions were instructed to set up medical aid programmes and appoint a staff

---

52 Brocades Zaalberg, *Soldiers and Civil Power*, 101–2.

53 Interview by Hugh Smith with John Sanderson.

54 Simon Smith, “General Templer and Counter-Insurgency in Malaya: Hearts and Minds, Intelligence, and Propaganda,” *Intelligence and National Security* 16, no. 3 (2001): 60–78; Paul Dixon, “Hearts and Minds? British Counter-Insurgency from Malaya to Iraq,” *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 32, no. 3 (June 2009): 353; Karl Hack, “The Malayan Emergency as Counter-Insurgency Paradigm,” *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 32, no. 3 (June 2009): 383–414.

55 CV Lieutenant General John M. Sanderson, AMBZ, BZ-00391; Interview by Hugh Smith with John Sanderson.

56 Internal message Sanderson to Akashi, 10 August 1993, “GAO Draft Report Lessons Learned from the Cambodian Operation,” ADFA, Sanderson Papers, box 3, file 14.

57 Brocades Zaalberg, *Soldiers and Civil Power*, 100; Findlay, *Cambodia*, 142–43. Interview by Hugh Smith with John Sanderson.

58 Hayes, “With a Little Help From the Troops”; *The Peacekeeper: the military force newsletter*, March/April 1993, UNA, S-0794-0020-0002.

officer to coordinate civic action. It was the first time this was ever done in a UN peacekeeping mission.<sup>59</sup> The projects were coordinated as much as possible with NGOs that were active in Cambodia, in order to guarantee the sustainment of the projects in the long run.<sup>60</sup> Sanderson later described this effort as “forging an alliance with the Cambodian people” to enhance their commitment to the elections.<sup>61</sup> Though keeping it implicit at the time, UNTAC was applying counterinsurgency methods to win over the Cambodians and nip the Khmer Rouge’s efforts to control the population in the bud. The force commander himself recalled that when UNTAC started to penetrate more deeply into the contested zones and implement civic action projects, “the Khmer Rouge began to notice that they had a competitor for the hearts and minds of the Cambodian people.”<sup>62</sup>

An effective way to reach the Cambodians was through an independent UNTAC radio station. Timothy Carney, the head of UNTAC’s Information and Education component, an American diplomat with long experience in Cambodia, had long pleaded for broadcasting radio programmes in Khmer to effectively disseminate UNTAC’s message to the Cambodian people.<sup>63</sup> The Secretary-General, however, was initially sceptical about the intrusiveness of a radio station and blocked the idea. But in November 1992, he changed his mind and gave the green light after all. As no preparations had been made, Radio UNTAC first used the old Soviet-made radio transmitters of the SOC in Phnom Penh and the Voice of America radio in Thailand to cover the entire country. It was only in April 1993, by the time the election campaign officially began, that UNTAC received its own radio transmitter. Radio UNTAC broadcasted programmes fifteen hours a day, including political debates between the parties with equal speaking time and the “right of response” for every candidate. The Japanese government and NGOs donated a total of 347,804 radios which were distributed among the Cambodian population. Listening to this free and neutral source of information quickly became a favourite pastime for many Cambodians around the country.<sup>64</sup> Sanderson later stated: “I do not believe that anyone could now deny the criticality of Radio UNTAC to the whole process. In my view, this was obvious from the start and only the United Nations bureaucracy delayed it.”<sup>65</sup> The fact that UNTAC’s radio transmitter was under heavy guard by blue helmets, twenty-four hours a day, reveals both the importance of this asset to UNTAC’s efforts in winning over the Cambodian population to participate in the elections as well as the potential threat of Khmer Rouge sabotage actions. UNTAC also jammed the Khmer Rouge radio station from time to time, when its broadcasts were considered “non-neutral.”<sup>66</sup> In this competition for influence over the hearts and minds of the Cambodians, UNTAC and the Khmer Rouge found themselves in something that strongly resembled an information war.

Going beyond a competition for influence over the hearts and minds of the Cambodians,

---

59 Findlay, *Cambodia*, 142–43; Brocades Zaalberg, *Soldiers and Civil Power*, 100.

60 Hayes, “With a Little Help From the Troops.”

61 Sanderson, “The UNTAC Military Component,” 126; Interview by Hugh Smith with John Sanderson.

62 Sanderson, “UNTAC: Successes and Failures,” 21.

63 Jennar, “Cambodge: l’entreprise inachevée,” 59; Findlay, *Cambodia*, 86, 152; Doyle, “UNTAC: Sources of Success and Failure,” 92; Peou, *Conflict Neutralization*, 207.

64 Schear, “Riding the Tiger,” 169; Brown and Zasloff, *Cambodia Confounds the Peacemakers*, 127–28; Shawcross, *Deliver Us from Evil*, 76.

65 Sanderson, “UNTAC: The Military Component View,” 133.

66 Michael Haas, *Modern Cambodia’s Emergence from the Killing Fields: What happened in the critical years?* (Los Angeles: Publishing House for Scholars, 2012), 63.

some UNTAC battalions also employed civic action in an effort to pacify the Khmer Rouge more directly. Army doctors of the French battalion offered free medical treatment to Khmer Rouge officers, soldiers and their family members with the aim to lure them out of their mountain hideouts and persuade them to disarm and demobilise. It seemed to work, as a small number of war wary Khmer Rouge actually did present themselves to the French blue berets to hand in their weapons voluntarily.<sup>67</sup> The second Dutch battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Patrick Cammaert, described civic action as his “best weapon” in dealing with the Khmer Rouge.<sup>68</sup> It allowed him to create a good rapport with a local Khmer Rouge general, Neak Vong, who had indicated to him that the village of which he was the mayor suffered from a great shortage of rice supply. After Cammaert had promised Vong to see what he could do, he delivered five ox-carts filled with rice bags to the general’s village. The gesture resulted in a better exchange of information and permission for the Dutch marines to patrol in some Khmer Rouge-controlled areas which had previously been off-limits to UNTAC.<sup>69</sup> Civic action thus became a somewhat more structurally applied tool to pacify the Khmer Rouge in preparation of the elections. Strictly speaking, UNTAC was not involved in counterinsurgency as the objective was not to defeat the Khmer Rouge, but the fact that peacekeepers applied soft counterinsurgency methods to deal with an identified insurgent that thwarted the mission’s ultimate objective, reveals that the principle of impartiality was only maintained in theory.

### Keeping up impartiality

To obtain its objective of organising free and fair elections, UNTAC needed all parties to stay committed to the peace process, which forced it into a balancing act of trying to keep up the appearance of an impartial peacekeeping force. UNTAC was not only confronted with the increasing aggressiveness of the Khmer Rouge, but also with the State of Cambodia, whose willingness to faithfully implement the peace agreement was rapidly evaporating. The Khmer Rouge had not demobilised any of their forces, while controlling more territory and people than they had before the peace agreements. Meanwhile, UNTAC’s presence was not only weakening the SOC, but also undermining the Phnom Penh government’s popularity with the Cambodian people. The arrival of large numbers of foreign troops had resulted in a huge inflow of foreign cash, which led to inflation, increased corruption, and a widening gap between poor peasants in the countryside and an increasingly rich urban minority. These developments were grist to Pol Pot’s mill, as they further discredited Hun Sen.<sup>70</sup> Hun Sen made it clear that if the military situation would continue to deteriorate further, he would resort to military means to counter the

---

67 Cable French Ambassador Phnom Penh to Paris, 28 August 1992, “visite dans la zone du bataillon français,” ADN, 10POI/1 1311; Patrice de Beer, “Cambodge: la visite de M. Pierre Joxe aux « casques bleus » français: l’armée humanitaire,” *Le Monde*, 2 October 1992.

68 Author’s interview with Patrick Cammaert, 18 December 2018, New York, United States; Memorandum Netherlands Embassy Bangkok to The Hague, 16 March 1993, “Defensie ontwikkelingsprojecten Kambodja,” AMBZ, BZ-00169.

69 Author’s interview with Patrick Cammaert; Klazien van Brandwijk-Wiltjer, “Iedere missie was uniek,” *Checkpoint*, January–February 2013, 44; Bootsma, *Kijk niet weg*, 96; Schoonoord, *Mariniers in Cambodja*, 168; Bais, *Het mijneveld van een vredesmacht*, 97–98; Vriens, “Waterputten voor de Rode Khmer,” 27.

70 Klintworth, “Cambodia 1992: Hopes Fading,” 123.

Khmer Rouge encroachment.<sup>71</sup> On 5 January, the SOC prime minister officially requested the UN Secretary-General to change UNTAC's mandate into a Chapter VII operation to allow UN forces to forcibly enter Khmer Rouge zones.<sup>72</sup> He also publicly stated that the time had come to kick the Khmer Rouge out of the peace process, declare them outlaws and fight them in a joint CPAF-UNTAC effort.<sup>73</sup> The Khmer Rouge replied by accusing UNTAC of collaborating with Hun Sen's forces in order "to kill the Cambodian nation and the Cambodian people."<sup>74</sup> Sanderson believed that these "over the top" statements reflected a growing desperation resulting from the situation on the battlefield which was not developing in their favour.<sup>75</sup> The CPAF had launched a successful new offensive and was moving in on the Khmer Rouge-controlled town of Pailin. Hun Sen told Akashi that he could take Pailin within a week if he wanted to, but that he would not resume his attacks if UNTAC troops interposed themselves in a buffer zone between his forces and the Khmer Rouge.<sup>76</sup> Akashi was interested in the proposal, but Sanderson argued that his peacekeepers would be put at too much risk if they would attempt to monitor a buffer zone without the Khmer Rouge's agreement.<sup>77</sup> However, Hun Sen's proposal was made from a position of weakness as his forces were insufficient in number and strength to sustain their offensive in the Pailin area. The much better trained and disciplined Khmer Rouge succeeded in mounting a counterattack and take some CPAF soldiers prisoner.<sup>78</sup>

Hun Sen continued to pressure UNTAC by publicly criticising the peacekeepers' passiveness by commenting that, in the face of danger, UNTAC soldiers "run more quickly than Cambodians because they have helicopters and Landcruisers."<sup>79</sup> His minister of foreign affairs, Hor Namhong, bluntly stated to the press that UNTAC was an utter failure. "They are incapable of doing anything," he said. "They take no risk whatsoever. They are here to pile up dollars and have no idea what their humanitarian missions should be" [sic].<sup>80</sup> Hun Sen complained that the supervision and control of his bureaucracy was "harsh and intrusive," while UNTAC was not exercising any control over the Khmer Rouge, and FUNCINPEC and the KPNLF hardly had an administration to control.<sup>81</sup> The SOC, however, was evading UNTAC control as much as possible. The nature of the communist state apparatus, in which government was strongly entangled with the political party structures, made this relatively easy. When UNTAC administrators tried to establish control over the SOC ministries in Phnom Penh, they soon discovered that they were empty shells, and that the real decision-making processes were taking place in the channels of the

---

71 Cable Akashi to Goulding, 9 November 1992, "Beijing talks," UNA, S-1829-0312-0005.

72 Letter Boutros-Ghali to Hun Sen, 29 January 1993, UNA, S-1829-0311-0005.

73 "Phnom Penh: kick Khmer Rouge out of peace plan," *AFP*, 5 January 1993.

74 Declaration of NADK spokesman on the co-operation by some UNTAC people with the Vietnamese and its puppet in Battambang in launching an offensive against UNTAC, 10 January 1993, UNA, S-1829-0312-0001; "Khmer Rouge Say U.N. Is Backing Vietnam," *The New York Times*, 3 January 1993.

75 Cable Sanderson to Goulding, 11 January 1993, "Situation in Battambang province," UNA, S-1829-0312-0001.

76 Cable Akashi to Goulding, 24 January 1993, "Situation in Pailin," UNA, S-0794-0049-0003.

77 Cable Akashi to Goulding, 3 February 1993, "Meeting met Hun Sen," UNA, S-0794-0049-0003; Philip Shenon, "Cambodia Halts Drive on Rebels," *The International Herald Tribune*, 3 February 1993.

78 Cable French Ambassador Phnom Penh to Paris, 11 January 1993, "Attaque de la zone de Pailin par les forces de l'état du Cambodge," ADN, 10POI/1 1312.

79 Interoffice memorandum Peschoux to Carney, 27 January 1993, "Report on a visit to Kampot," ADN, 521 PO/231.

80 Kamm, "Cambodia Election Snared as Peace Pact Unravels."

81 Cable Akashi to Goulding, 9 November 1992, "Beijing talks," UNA, S-1829-0312-0005.

SOC's political wing: the Cambodian People's Party (CPP).<sup>82</sup> Moreover, much of the state power resided with officials in the provinces, where authority was exercised through informal channels. The French director of UNTAC's civil administration component, Gérard Porcell, did not give priority to establishing effective control at the provincial level. He was irritated by UNTAC's lack of firmness vis-à-vis the Khmer Rouge and demonstrated a certain level of comprehension for the SOC's position. He felt that UNTAC could only negotiate with rather than control the SOC as long as it negotiated with rather than controlled the Khmer Rouge.<sup>83</sup> Instead of exercising control, UNTAC administrators were more successful in providing technical assistance, combatting corruption, and improving the efficiency of the Phnom Penh ministries. They created codes of conducts for SOC civil servants and trained them in accounting and more effective tax collection, which immediately led to an increase in revenue for the SOC.<sup>84</sup> So, ultimately, UNTAC was more reforming than controlling the bureaucracy of the Phnom Penh government.

Although it had officially sworn off communism, the CPP had difficulties in accepting the principles of pluralistic democracy and decided to attack and intimidate its political opponents rather than trying to convince the Cambodian electorate for their vote. Elements of the CPP caused a wave of politically motivated violence, especially aimed at the royalist FUNCINPEC party, which they considered as their greatest competitor in the upcoming elections. Indeed, the party of Prince Ranariddh was immensely popular, which was in no small measure the result of its association with Prince Sihanouk, tactfully exploited by Ranariddh, who made public statements during rallies such as: "give me the power so I may give it to my father."<sup>85</sup> In December 1992, fourteen FUNCINPEC party cadres were murdered and thirty party offices were attacked, ransacked or burned.<sup>86</sup> Other forms of violent intimidation, such as harassment and abductions, were no exceptions, especially in the provinces of Battambang, Siem Reap, and Kompong Thom. SOC police officers said they could not allow members of FUNINPEC, whom they viewed as the "enemy from within," to fly their flag freely on the territory they controlled.<sup>87</sup> Protesting against the political violence, Ranariddh followed his father's example and announced on 4 January that he would cease all working relations with UNTAC as long as no "energetic and effective measures" were taken to end the climate of violence. He also left Phnom Penh saying he feared for his safety.<sup>88</sup> Ranariddh was under pressure from within his own party, and his Khmer Rouge contacts, to pick up the weapons against the SOC and withdraw from the electoral process. Knowing that this would mean the end of the elections and thus the failure of UNTAC, Akashi

---

82 The ex-Soviet participants in the drafting of the peace accords later admitted that they accepted control of the SOC precisely because they knew how easy it would be for the SOC to resist it. See: Ratner, *The New UN Peacekeeping*, 173; Schear, "Riding the Tiger," 159; Benny Widyono, *Dancing in Shadows: Sihanouk, the Khmer Rouge, and the United Nations in Cambodia* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008), 67.

83 On 26 February 1993, Porcell resigned out of sheer frustration with what was, in his view, UNTAC's lack of firmness vis-à-vis the Khmer Rouge. However, he was eventually persuaded to stay on until the elections. See: "Cambodge: déçu par l'impuissance de l'ONU le responsable civil de l'APRONUC le Français Gérard Porcell, va abandonner ses fonctions," *Le Monde*, 28 February 1993; "U.N. official in Cambodia decides to stay on," *Reuters*, 5 March 1993; Doyle, *UNTAC's Civil Mandate*, 43; Widyono, *Dancing in Shadows*, 19; Ratner, *The New UN Peacekeeping*, 202.

84 Ratner, *The New UN peacekeeping*, 176.

85 Jennar, "Democratization in Cambodia," 520.

86 Jennar, *Chroniques Cambodgiennes*, 223.

87 Widyono, *Dancing in Shadows*, 117.

88 Mark Dodd, "Sihanouk's son stops cooperation with U.N.," *Reuters*, 5 January 1993.



was anxious to keep Ranariddh engaged in the peace process.<sup>89</sup> Akashi now felt that he had to do something to save the electoral process from total collapse and ordered peacekeepers to protect FUNCINPEC party offices and provide security at multi-party rallies. When the SOC authorities denied Ranariddh to use his private aircraft to fly to campaign rallies, UNTAC helicopters gave the prince a lift.<sup>90</sup>

On 6 January, Akashi took a bold and revolutionary step by creating a special prosecutors' office with the aim to prosecute persons responsible for human rights violations. Mark Plunkett, an Australian lawyer, was appointed as UNTAC's special prosecutor with the authority to arrest and try suspects within Cambodian courts. In this unprecedented directive, Akashi made maximum use of his powers and stretched the boundaries of his peacekeeping mandate.<sup>91</sup> Two suspects were quickly arrested by UNTAC's civil police, but as the UN did not have its own tribunal in Cambodia, it was dependent on the judiciary system of the SOC. After the hearing of the first case in which a SOC policeman was charged with the murder of a FUNCINPEC official, the SOC minister of Justice intervened by threatening the chief judge of the court if he would proceed with the case. As a result, the court refused to hear any new cases brought forward by the special prosecutor.<sup>92</sup> The consequence was that suspects were sometimes held in custody by UNTAC police for months. As it was unsuccessfully executed, the experiment failed to have a deterrent effect on political violence. However, the mere creation of the Special Prosecutor's office had a strong symbolic value and fulfilled Akashi's objective to keep FUNCINPEC committed to UNTAC-organised elections. The fear of losing UNTAC's credibility had driven Akashi to take this drastic measure.<sup>93</sup>

Equally controversial, but more successful, was Akashi's decision of 19 January to deploy special UNTAC control teams to the provinces to investigate abuses of state power and human rights violations. Without prior warning, these "hush hush teams," as they were informally called, secretly landed with helicopters near a preselected SOC provincial office. Here they blocked all exits before storming inside and started to go through documents, notebooks and correspondences as they pleased. These surprise visits were successful. UNTAC found evidence for the subversion of UNTAC control by SOC officials and their implication in the intimidation of political parties of the opposition.<sup>94</sup> Hun Sen was irritated and complained to Akashi about the intrusive methods of the special control teams, treating all SOC officials as suspects. He warned that this activity was "a dangerous adventure" that could lead to the destruction of the entire peace process, and threatened to publicly denounce UNTAC if these actions were to continue.<sup>95</sup> Akashi realised that he had to be careful not to provoke the complete non-cooperation of Hun Sen, who actually made demonstrations of goodwill by publicly denouncing the practices of intimidation against

---

89 Meeting Akashi with Prince Ranariddh, 14 January 1993, UNA, S-1829-0311-0006; Shawcross, *Deliver Us from Evil*, 75.

90 Schear, "Riding the Tiger," 169.

91 Directive No. 93/1 from the Special Representative of the Secretary-General establishing procedures for the Prosecution of persons responsible for Human Rights Violations, 6 January 1993, UNA, S-1829-0312-0001; Ratner, *The New UN Peacekeeping*, 182; Brocades Zaalberg, *Soldiers and Civil Power*, 131.

92 Cable Akashi to Goulding, 3 February 1993, "Special Prosecutor's office," UNA, S-1829-0311-0005.

93 Brocades Zaalberg, *Soldiers and Civil Power*, 132, 154.

94 Widyono, *Dancing in Shadow*, 67–68; Doyle, *UNTAC's Civil Mandate*, 44; Ratner, *The New UN Peacekeeping*, 177; Schear, "Riding the Tiger," 160.

95 Meeting Akashi with Hun Sen, 22 March 1992, UNA, S-0794-0050-0002.

political opponents as unacceptable, and calling on his local authorities to cooperate fully and unconditionally with UNTAC.<sup>96</sup> In March, Akashi saw a decreasing trend in the political violence and thus decided to stop parachuting his control teams. Again, the special representative had taken a far-reaching measure to save UNTAC's credibility as the guarantor of a neutral political environment.

Akashi pushed his efforts to demonstrate his impartiality even further by demonstrating that UNTAC made serious work of verifying the withdrawal of Vietnamese forces. He had already made considerable concessions to respond to the Khmer Rouge's "concerns" with regard to this issue, such as establishing mobile investigation teams and broadening the definition of "foreign forces."<sup>97</sup> The Khmer Rouge, however, continued to accuse UNTAC of not doing enough, and FUNCINPEC and KPNLF sometimes joined them in claiming that UNTAC was turning a blind eye to the Vietnamese "soldiers in disguise" who had stayed behind after Hanoi's withdrawal in 1989.<sup>98</sup> This meant that there was always pressure on Akashi from the resistance factions to "deliver" on finding Vietnamese forces. This pressure increased further in February 1993 when the highest-ranking generals in Thailand publicly accused Akashi and Sanderson of being "biased" against the Khmer Rouge because they had never tried to verify the presence of Vietnamese forces in Cambodia. The Thai top brass threatened that they were considering to withdraw the two Thai engineer battalions from Cambodia – that were repairing roads near the Thai border – because they had lost all confidence in UNTAC's leadership.<sup>99</sup> Sanderson demanded an official apology from the Thai government for this "slander," but Foreign Minister Prasong appeased the matter by suggesting that the *Bangkok Post* had misquoted the Thai generals.<sup>100</sup>

Influenced by the verbal attack on him by the Thai generals or not, Akashi decided to push the investigations for "foreign forces" to the extreme by announcing on 1 March that UNTAC had found three Vietnamese-Cambodians who had served in the Vietnamese army. Two of them were now serving with the CPAF, and the third had retired from the Vietnamese army in 1984 as a translator. Despite the fact that all three men possessed Cambodian identity cards, were married to Cambodian women and had children with them, Akashi maintained that they fitted the broadened definition of foreign forces and requested the Phnom Penh authorities to withdraw their Cambodian nationality and bring them back to Vietnam.<sup>101</sup> The Vietnamese government was furious and refused to cooperate, arguing that it would violate the UN conventions on human

---

96 Meeting with H.E. Mr. Hun Sen, Battambang, 16 February 1993, UNA, S-0794-0050-0001; Widyono, *Dancing in Shadow*, 67–68.

97 On 20 October 1992, Akashi found agreement in the Supreme National Council to define foreign forces as "any foreign regular, paramilitary and auxiliary forces, advisers and military personnel who remained in Cambodia thereafter." See: Schear, "Riding the Tiger," 183.

98 Brown and Zasloff, *Cambodia confounds the peacemakers*, 295; Nate Thayer, "Martial Races: UN search for Vietnamese forces fuels 'ethnic cleansing'," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 25 March 1993, 30.

99 One engineering battalion was wearing blue berets and stood under UNTAC's command. The other battalion wore Thai berets, and was part of a bilateral arrangement with the SNC. See: "Withdrawal from Cambodia possible," *Bangkok Post*, 13 February 1992; "Security chief slams UNTAC," *Bangkok Post*, 12 February 1993.

100 Cable Sanderson to Annan, 16 February 1993, "Slander of the UNTAC mission by Thailand," UNA, S-0794-0012-0003; Note to the file Meeting with Thai Foreign Minister, 5 March 1993, UNA, S-0794-0012-0003.

101 Withdrawal of foreign forces statement by the UNTAC spokesperson, UNA, S-1829-0311-0003; Henry Kamm, "U.N. Authority Says It Has Found Few Hanoi Soldiers in Cambodia," *The New York Times*, 3 March 1993; Nate Thayer, "Martial Races: UN search for Vietnamese forces fuels 'ethnic cleansing'," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 25 March 1993, 30.

rights.<sup>102</sup>

Whether Akashi's action was a last attempt to satisfy the Khmer Rouge and persuade them to join the electoral process remains unclear, but it certainly was part of his balancing act to keep up UNTAC's impartiality. The special representative told Kofi Annan, who had taken over from Marrack Goulding as the head of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations in March 1993, that he hoped that the revelations about UNTAC's investigations would increase its stock with the opposition parties, including the Khmer Rouge, and the Cambodian people in general, while a confrontation on the issue with the SOC would do little harm to bolster its impartial credentials.<sup>103</sup> Annan gave his approval but also expressed concern that the Khmer Rouge could claim that the three men were but the tip of the iceberg and proof of the presence of an even larger number of Vietnamese troops in Cambodia.<sup>104</sup> The Under-Secretary-General was correct. Although Akashi publicly declared that the discovery of the three men proved that UNTAC was trying to get to the bottom of the matter, it completely failed to impress the Khmer Rouge, who only responded that it was ridiculous that it had taken UNTAC sixteen months to find three Vietnamese soldiers while more than 45,000 Vietnamese "troops in disguise" were still hiding in Cambodia.<sup>105</sup> Instead, they further increased their hostile rhetoric by claiming that the UN and the Western powers in the Security Council were aligning themselves with Vietnam in an effort to eliminate the Khmer Rouge while doing nothing about the "invasion" of Cambodia by more than two million Vietnamese settlers.<sup>106</sup> Akashi's efforts to enhance UNTAC's credentials as an impartial party were supported by Security Council resolution 810, adopted on 8 March 1993, which expressed "strong concern" about the "foreign military personnel" that UNTAC had found, and requested their immediate removal from Cambodia.<sup>107</sup> A day later, Akashi announced to the Supreme National Council that UNTAC had found five more Vietnamese-Cambodians who also fitted the description of foreign forces and demanded that they too were expelled back to Vietnam. But again, Hanoi refused to cooperate.<sup>108</sup>

Akashi's attempt to emphasise UNTAC's impartiality completely backfired when the Khmer Rouge committed their most atrocious killing of ethnic Vietnamese since the UN presence in Cambodia. On 10 March, a group of eighteen Khmer Rouge soldiers murdered thirty-four Vietnamese-Cambodian civilians at Chong Kneas, a floating village on the Tonlé Sap Lake at the end of the Siem Reap River. Adding to the horror was the fact that the "Vietnamese" victims – who in fact had lived in Cambodia since three generations – were mostly women and children. UN military observers operating in the area had stepped up their patrols on the lake, hoping that their presence might deter any attacks. Unfortunately, they were too late to respond and only arrived on the scene the following morning.<sup>109</sup> Because two of the attackers were shot dead by one of the

---

102 "Hanoi says U.N. resolution on Cambodia violates human rights," *AFP*, 9 March 1993.

103 Cable Akashi to Annan, 1 March 1993, "withdrawal and non-return of foreign forces," UNA, S-0794-0050-0001.

104 Cable Annan to Akashi, 1 March 1993, "presence of foreign troops," UNA, S-1829-0311-0003.

105 "U.N. Cambodia chief says more Vietnamese troops in Cambodia," *AFP*, 5 March 1993.

106 "UN, Western powers plotting to get rid of us, says Khmer Rouge," *The Straits Times*, 2 March 1993.

107 Security Council Resolution 810 (1993), 8 March 1993, S/RES/810 (1993).

108 Sheri Prasso, "U.N. finds more foreign forces in Cambodia," *AFP*, 9 March 1993.

109 Kiernan, "The Failures of the Paris Agreement on Cambodia," 13; Cable Akashi to Annan, 15 March 1993, "Massacre at Chong Kneas: response by UNTAC," UNA, S-0794-0050-0002; Katrina Peach, "UNMOs Powerless to Protect Ethnic Vietnamese," *The Phnom Penh Post*, 26 March 1993.

victims who had been able to grab a gun and fight back, the UN could identify the perpetrators as belonging to the Khmer Rouge 980<sup>th</sup> division. UNTAC's special prosecutor issued a warrant for the arrest of the unit's commander.<sup>110</sup> A broadcast on the Khmer Rouge radio credited those who were responsible for the attack, and accused Akashi of "protecting the Vietnamese" because of his efforts to bring the perpetrators to justice.<sup>111</sup> Hanoi accused UNTAC of inciting the massacre through its witch hunt for remaining Vietnamese soldiers in Cambodia.<sup>112</sup> Some have suggested that through these murders, the Khmer Rouge hoped to force UNTAC and the Phnom Penh government to take protective measures for Vietnamese-Cambodian civilians, thus making them the target of possible charges of being pro-Vietnamese.<sup>113</sup>

The diplomatic community in Phnom Penh feared that renewed attacks by the Khmer Rouge on ethnic Vietnamese could blow up the electoral process.<sup>114</sup> When Akashi called a staff meeting to discuss what measures UNTAC should take to avoid further attacks, there were two opposing views. Dennis McNamara, the head of UNTAC's Human Rights component, strongly believed that UNTAC should take preventive security measures, arguing that this would fall within the operation's legal possibilities. Sanderson, on the other hand, was reluctant to get involved in what he defined as "internal security operations." The force commander feared that by protecting the Vietnamese Cambodians, UNTAC could easily become a "fifth faction," thereby undermining its "peacekeeping credentials." He argued that the step from being a "supervisor" to being an "enforcer" was a short one which could only lead UNTAC onto a slippery slope towards actions outside the framework of peacekeeping. Akashi acknowledged the reality of widespread anti-Vietnamese feelings among ordinary Cambodians, and therefore felt that UNTAC should avoid being seen as the protector of the "Vietnamese" against "Cambodians." He saw a serious risk of falling into this trap set by Khmer Rouge propaganda.<sup>115</sup> Ultimately, it was decided to step up UNTAC military patrols with the aim to deter attacks, but without the specific instruction to protect the civilian population. Annan agreed that anything going beyond these actions would give UNTAC "an enforcement role" for which it was not mandated.<sup>116</sup>

While UNTAC carefully stayed away from getting embroiled in the Vietnamese issue, the Khmer Rouge continued their violent actions. On 24 March, another eight ethnic Vietnamese Cambodians were killed when their fishing boat was halted by a group of Khmer Rouge who opened fire at point blank range.<sup>117</sup> On the same day, Sanderson, on leave in Australia, spoke at a conference on UN peacekeeping in Canberra. In his paper, the force commander made it clear

---

110 Cable Akashi to Annan, 17 April 1993, "Possible measures to improve security conditions," UNA, S-1085-0030-0008.

111 Nayan Chanda and Nate Thayer, "Rivers of Blood: Khmer Rouge step up drive against Vietnamese," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 8 April 1993, 22.

112 Cable Akashi to Annan, 13 March 1993, "meeting with the Vietnamese Ambassador on 12 March 1993," UNA, S-1829-0311-0002.

113 Klintworth, "Cambodia 1992: Hopes Fading," 124.

114 Cable Annan to Akashi, 16 February 1993, "SecGen's report and Core group consultations," UNA, S-1829-0311-0004.

115 Cable Akashi to Annan, 15 March 1993, "Massacre at Chong Kneas: response by UNTAC," UNA, S-0794-0050-0002.

116 Cable Annan to Akashi, 17 March 1993, "Chong Kneas Massacre," UNA, S-0794-0045-0002.

117 Nayan Chanda and Nate Thayer, "Rivers of Blood: Khmer Rouge step up drive against Vietnamese," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 8 April 1993, 22.

that UNTAC's mission was not to defend Cambodia, but to defend the electoral process.<sup>118</sup> This meant that UNTAC completely relied on the police forces of the State of Cambodia to maintain public order and contain the violence against Vietnamese Cambodians. In order to avoid being completely passive, UNTAC decided to support the SOC riot police by training and reequipping them.<sup>119</sup>

The massacres in March sparked a mass migration of some 20,000 ethnic Vietnamese who, in hundreds of boats, floated down the Tonlé Sap Lake and the Mekong River across the border into Vietnam.<sup>120</sup> In what was called "operation safe passage," UNTAC monitored the security (provided by the CPAF) for the boats with refugees. Sadako Ogata, head of UNHCR, had come to Phnom Penh to celebrate the successful repatriation of more than 370,000 Cambodian refugees from Thailand. This was the impressive result of UNTAC's repatriation component led by Sergio Vieira de Mello, which should have marked the end of the Indochina refugee crisis. Unfortunately, witnessing the fleet of refugees herself, Ogata was compelled to condemn a new campaign of "ethnic cleansing."<sup>121</sup> As the largest exodus in Indochina in more than a decade occurred, Akashi decided not to pursue the search for more Vietnamese forces. The Khmer Rouge thus eventually succeeded in their goal of chasing as many Cambodians of Vietnamese origin as possible out of the country and prevent them from voting in the elections.<sup>122</sup>

### **The Khmer Rouge: the main threat to UNTAC's success**

The preoccupations of UNTAC's leadership in the first three months of 1993 were mainly with the politically motivated violence by elements of the SOC. By March, however, they were brutally reminded that UNTAC's ability to actually hold elections depended first and foremost on the passiveness of the Khmer Rouge. Since the beginning of the UN's deployment in Cambodia, the Khmer Rouge had fired on UN helicopters, intimidated and detained blue helmets, but in the two months before the elections, UNTAC began to suffer casualties as a result of deliberate Khmer Rouge attacks. On 27 March 1993, peacekeepers of the Bangladeshi battalion in Angkor Chun, in Siem Reap province, was attacked by at least forty Khmer Rouge soldiers firing mortars, RPGs, and machine guns at their base. The Bangladeshis rushed to their trenches, returned fire, and after an hour of fighting succeeded in forcing the attackers to retreat. One Bangladeshi soldier was heavily wounded in combat and died from his injuries the day after. Two Khmer Rouge soldiers were also killed, and four locals were injured when they accidentally walked into the line of fire.<sup>123</sup> Akashi and others feared that this Khmer Rouge attack on UNTAC, in combination with the killings of the ethnic Vietnamese, might be the starting signal of a large-scale Khmer Rouge

---

118 J. M. Sanderson (Lt. Gen.), "Preparations for, deployment and conduct of peacekeeping operations: a Cambodia snapshot," Paper presented at the conference on UN Peacekeeping at the Crossroads, Canberra, 21–24 March 1993, 10. Also cited in: Findlay, *The Use of Force*, 126.

119 Cable Akashi to Annan, 17 April 1993, "Possible measures to improve security conditions," UNA, S-1829-0272-0002.

120 Cable Akashi to Annan, 17 April 1993; Brief for the Force Commander 4 April 1993, UNA, S-1854-0007-0002.

121 Nate Thayer, "Wretched of the Earth," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 15 April 1993.

122 Widyono, *Dancing in Shadows*, 98; Jay Jordans, "Persecution of Cambodia's Ethnic Vietnamese Communities During and Since the UNTAC Period," in *Propaganda, Politics, and Violence in Cambodia: Democratic Transition under United Nations Peace-keeping Propaganda, Politics, and Violence in Cambodia*, eds. Steve Heder and Judy Ledgerwood (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1996), 150.

123 Cable Rideau to Baril, 31 March 1993, "Special report on the Angkor Chum incident," UNA, S-0794-0020-0002.





*United Nations Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali (middle) and his Special Representative Yasushi Akashi (right) in Phnom Penh. Photo credit: UNA, S-0794-0044-0001.*

attempt to disrupt the entire electoral process. The special representative requested the Security Council to reaffirm UNTAC's right to use force in defence of the mission, but he did not deem it necessary to send military reinforcements to Siem Reap province. UNTAC was, after all, "not conducting a war against the [Khmer Rouge]," he wrote to Kofi Annan.<sup>124</sup>

UNTAC might have tried to avoid a military confrontation by ignoring and isolating the Khmer Rouge, its policy of preventing provocation failed to keep the Khmer Rouge passive. It seemed to have had the opposite effect, as the Khmer Rouge realised that the easiest way to stop the elections was to chase UNTAC out of Cambodia. Probably with the aim to test the troop contributing countries' tolerance for casualties, the Khmer Rouge stepped up their attacks on UNTAC contingents. In the evening of 2 April, Khmer Rouge soldiers killed three peacekeepers of the Bulgarian contingent at Phum Prek in Kompong Speu Province. The small unit, consisting of twelve Bulgarians, had maintained relatively good relations with the Khmer Rouge. As they had done before, the local Khmer Rouge commander had been invited to come over to the Bulgarian camp for dinner. Everything seemed to be well, but after the meal the commander returned with fifteen heavily armed soldiers who opened fire and chased the unarmed Bulgarian soldiers around the camp, throwing hand grenades into their tents.<sup>125</sup> Trying to pacify the Khmer Rouge by developing close relations with them turned out to have a dangerous side. Investigators believed that the Khmer Rouge commander had been ordered by a new fanatic superior officer

124 Cable Akashi to Annan, 28 March 1993, "Attack on UNTAC Bangladeshi Contingent," UNA, S-0794-0045-0002.

125 Interoffice memorandum Lt. Col. Suresh Nair to Rideau, 4 April 1993, "Investigation on the killing of Bul Batt soldiers in Phnum Prek," UNA, S-0794-0020-0002.



to deliberately murder the Bulgarians in exploiting their good contacts.<sup>126</sup> Sanderson concluded that the cold-blooded killing of the Bulgarian soldiers was “premeditated, carefully planned and precisely executed,” and feared that such acts would be repeated in the near future.<sup>127</sup> Planners at UNTAC headquarters now realised that the Khmer Rouge considered UNTAC “as their new adversary” and a “stumbling block” for their objectives.<sup>128</sup>

The Bulgarian contingent continued to suffer casualties in attacks by the Khmer Rouge later that month. In the night of 19 April 1993, the UNTAC district office in the town of Oral in Kompong Speu province came under attack by a hundred Khmer Rouge soldiers. The Bulgarian soldiers present at the office radioed for assistance after which two Bulgarian APCs were sent to the location. But before arriving on the scene, they drove into an ambush set by the Khmer Rouge. An RPG hit the first APC, killing one Bulgarian soldier instantly and badly injuring five others. Although the other peacekeepers managed to bring themselves to safety, the Khmer Rouge attackers looted the UNTAC office as well as the surrounding houses of the local population.<sup>129</sup> As the Khmer Rouge manifested themselves unmistakably as UNTAC’s enemy, Akashi and Sanderson decided to cease their balancing act on the tightrope of impartiality and move closer towards the State of Cambodia in order to safeguard the success of the mission.

### **The experiment that had to succeed**

The situation in Cambodia was looking increasingly grim, but for the United Nations it was unthinkable that UNTAC would fail. When Marrack Goulding addressed UN staffers at UNTAC headquarters during his visit to Cambodia in the last week of January 1993, the head of DPKO seemed to ignore the reality of the disconcerting situation and pretended as if UNTAC was already a synonym for success. He congratulated the UN personnel with the continued successes in Cambodia and further emphasised his expectation that UNTAC’s success would set the stage for future UN successes. UNTAC would illustrate to member states, he asserted confidently, what such large peacekeeping operations could achieve and why they were justified.<sup>130</sup> Goulding’s determination to present UNTAC as a success – no matter what, no matter how – is understandable when one takes into consideration that the reputation of the United Nations as the guarantor of peace in the new world order was at stake, as different scholars observed at the time. The research group from Columbia University concluded that if the UN would prove unable to bring a measure of peace and security to a relatively small and ethnically homogeneous nation such as Cambodia, the UN’s peacekeeping capabilities would be called into question.<sup>131</sup> Mats Berdal and Gerald Segal more explicitly observed that a failure in Cambodia would have direct negative consequences for

---

126 Ibid.

127 Interoffice memorandum Sanderson to Akashi, 5 April 1993, “Killing of Bulgarian Soldiers at Phum Prek on 2 April 1993,” UNA, S-0794-0021-0001.

128 Plans Branch Seminar 22 – 24 March 1993, UNA, S-0794-0020-0002.

129 Report on SIT investigation into the attack at New Oral 19 April 1993, 22 April 1993, UNA, S-1854-0072-0005; Cable Annan to Akashi, 23 April 1993, “SecGen’s letter on UNTAC casualties,” UNA, S-0794-0045-0002.

130 “UNTAC successes encourage UN,” *The Peacekeeper: the military force newsletter*, February 1993, UNA, S-0794-0020-0002.

131 Betts et al., *Time Is Running Out in Cambodia*.

the sustainment of the UN operations in the former Yugoslavia and Somalia.<sup>132</sup> Akashi understood very well that UNTAC was, in his own words, a “vitally important experiment for the UN.”<sup>133</sup> In a radio interview with the BBC he frankly admitted: “I cannot afford not to succeed.”<sup>134</sup> The famous Indian writer Amitav Ghosh, who visited Cambodia during UNTAC, observed the feeling among the international staff that the future of the UN was on trial. He wrote: “UN personnel were well aware that thousands of highly paid jobs were at stake. The political situation in Cambodia and the exigencies of local politics were, if not irrelevant, then at least secondary to the institutional dynamics that were brought into play.”<sup>135</sup>

Boutros-Ghali realised that UNTAC’s success was of enormous importance for the United Nations as an organisation and for his own credibility as Secretary-General. That is why, on 7 April 1993, the UN Secretary-General travelled to Phnom Penh to personally launch the election campaign and support one of the greatest commitments the UN had ever undertaken. During a meeting with UNTAC’s senior staff, he highlighted that it was “not only the future of Cambodia that is at stake.” UNTAC, he explained, symbolised the “new UN in action,” and a successful outcome of this “pilot operation” would help to set up similar operations elsewhere in the world.<sup>136</sup> Dennis McNamara, head of the Human Rights component, remembered that Boutros-Ghali’s overwhelming message was: “We’ve got to have these elections and get out.” The elections became an end in themselves.<sup>137</sup> In his address to the Supreme National Council, Boutros-Ghali openly called on the sense of responsibility of the Cambodian factions’ leaders by emphasising, again, that it was not only for the Cambodian people that UNTAC had an obligation to succeed in Cambodia: “If this experience fails, you will contribute to the failure of similar experiences in Latin America, Asia and Africa, and even in Europe where today we witness the drama of Yugoslavia. So this experience has to succeed.”<sup>138</sup> The Secretary-General made a last attempt to reason with Khieu Samphan, but was unable to convince the Khmer Rouge leader, who denounced the elections and declared that there would only be more trouble.<sup>139</sup>

For Boutros-Ghali, success in Cambodia was all the more important because it constituted an important experiment of “democratisation,” a process which was a central element of his agenda. During his press conference in Phnom Penh, the Secretary-General stressed that he was deeply convinced that there was a critical relation between peace, development, and democracy.<sup>140</sup> He

---

132 Gerald Segal and Mats Berdal, “A Cambodia Failure Would Hurt the UN Everywhere,” *International Herald Tribune*, 12 January 1993.

133 Thayer, “Moaners beware,” 27.

134 Yasushi Akashi, Interview in “Peace in the Killing Fields,” part 3 of *The Thin Blue Line*, BBC Radio 4, released 9 May 1993. Cited in: Doyle, “UNTAC – Sources of Success and Failure,” 97.

135 Amitav Ghosh, “Holiday in Cambodia: The U.N.’s strategic dead end,” *The New Republic*, 20 June 1993.

136 Allocution du Secrétaire Général adressée au personnel de l’APRONUC, Phnom Penh, 8 Avril 1993, UNA, S-0794-0051-0001.

137 Interview James S. Sutterlin with Dennis McNamara.

138 “Si cette expérience échoue, vous contribuerez à l’échec d’expériences similaires en Amérique latine, en Asie, en Afrique et même en Europe où nous vivons aujourd’hui le drame de la Yougoslavie. Donc il faut que cette expérience réussisse.” Cited in: Barbier, *Cambodge, 1991–1993*, 117. Also see: Compte rendu d’entretien de S.E.M. Boutros Boutros-Ghali avec les membres du Conseil National Suprême du Cambodge, Phnom Penh, le 7 avril 1993, UNA, S-0794-0051-0001: “L’échec au Cambodge aurait de mauvaises conséquences dans d’autres parties du monde. Le succès au Cambodge signifiera au contraire le succès pour toute la communauté internationale.”

139 Notes of the meeting of the Secretary-General with UNTAC Senior Staff, UNTAC Headquarters, Phnom Penh, 8 April 1993, UNA, S-1085-0031-0003.

140 Press Release SG/SM/1424, 7 April 1993, AMBZ, BZ-14528.

considered democracy as the crucial link in the chain and a precondition for the long sustainability of peace and development.<sup>141</sup> In his memoirs, Boutros-Ghali described democratisation as “the key theme” of his term as Secretary-General. Although it was a controversial topic within the UN Secretariat, he devoted many hours working on the concept, which finally resulted in his third and last agenda-paper, *An Agenda for Democratization*, which was published in 1996.<sup>142</sup> The extent to which the ideal of making peace through democratisation could succeed in Cambodia was nonetheless doubtful. Jarat Chopra and his fellow researchers from Brown University observed during their field trip to Cambodia that the notion of “free and fair” elections would have to be applied in an elastic manner.<sup>143</sup> During the Secretary-General’s visit to Cambodia, Dennis McNamara candidly made the point to Boutros-Ghali that the human rights situation in Cambodia “did not meet even the most minimal standards,” making it clear that in such an atmosphere it would be difficult to demonstrate that the elections would be free and fair.<sup>144</sup> Akashi admitted that the conditions for an election were certainly not perfect but felt that McNamara demanded “unrealistically high standards in the context of Cambodian reality.” If UNTAC waited for the perfect conditions, the elections would probably never take place, the special representative argued.<sup>145</sup>

McNamara’s remarks about the unsafe environment were quickly confirmed as the kick-off of the election campaign was interrupted by a tragic incident. On 8 April 1993, Nakata Atsuhito, a 25-year-old Japanese UNV who worked as a District Electoral Supervisor (DES) was brutally murdered, together with his Cambodian interpreter Lay Sok Pheap, in an isolated district of Kompong Thom province.<sup>146</sup> For many UN volunteers, the murder of their Japanese colleague in the context of a general increase of deliberate Khmer Rouge attacks was a shocking wake-up call, laying bare the risks that were involved in their mission.<sup>147</sup> Groups of electoral supervisors logically panicked and threatened to resign unless guarantees were given that the military component would protect them. This endangered the entire mission because holding elections without the UNVs would be near to impossible.<sup>148</sup> Akashi therefore called the electoral volunteers to Phnom Penh where he tried to convince them to stay by promising that the military would take enhanced security measures to guarantee their safety. This reassured many UNVs, although sixty of the 700

---

141 Boutros-Ghali, *Unvanquished*, 319; Boutros Boutros-Ghali, “the United Nations and democratization,” in *The African Yearbook of International Law*, ed. A.A. Yusuf (The Hague: Kluwer International Law, 1996) 11–16.

142 Boutros-Ghali, *Unvanquished*, 319; Boutros Boutros-Ghali, *An Agenda for Democratization* (New York: United Nations Publications, 1996). During his time as Secretary-General he wrote three Agendas: *An Agenda for Peace* in 1992, *An Agenda for Development* in 1994 and *An Agenda for Democratization* in 1996.

143 Jarat Chopra et al., *Report on the Cambodian Peace Process*, 26, 33.

144 Notes of the meeting of the Secretary-General with UNTAC Senior Staff, 8 April 1993, UNA, S-1085-0031-0003.

145 Neutral political environment, statement by Mr. Akashi, 4 April 1992, UNA, S-0794-0051-0001; Yasushi Akashi, “The Challenge of Peacekeeping in Cambodia,” *International Peacekeeping* 1, no.2 (1994): 210.

146 The initial assumption was that the Khmer Rouge was responsible for the attack, but after investigation it appeared that the murder was committed by a Cambodian civilian who had been turned down for a job as a polling official in the district. Jan Powell, *A Long Road to Peace UNV in Cambodia 1992/93* (UNDP: Geneva, 1995), 38.

147 Powell, *A Long Road to Peace*, 38.

148 Highlights of the UNTAC Information Working Group Meeting, 20 April 1993, subject: “Changes in the Politico-Military Situation and implications for Election and UNTAC Security,” ADN, 521PO/2 33; Meeting Sanderson with General Ke Kim Yan commander-in-chief, Cambodian People’s Armed Forces, Phnom Penh UNTAC HQ, 20 April 1993, UNA, S-0794-0021-0001.

eventually decided to leave Cambodia before the elections.<sup>149</sup>

The murder also sent shockwaves through Japan. A day after the incident, the Japanese defence minister, Toshio Nakayama, declared that an emergency evacuation of all Japanese personnel from Cambodia should be considered if the scenario of a widespread armed disruption of the elections was considered likely.<sup>150</sup> Two days later, Australian foreign minister Evans equally created the impression that Australia might decide to pull-out from Cambodia in the case of a full-frontal Khmer Rouge assault, but he later emphasised that he would not make such a decision unilaterally.<sup>151</sup> With Tokyo and Canberra, again, raising doubts publicly about their full commitment to the operation, the Secretary-General believed it necessary to emphasise that peace was not for free. On 12 April, at a press conference in Bangkok, Boutros-Ghali stressed: "If we want to promote peace, we must take the risks which are related to the promotion of peace." He added that since the first peacekeeping operations, more than 700 peacekeepers had been killed in action to achieve the UN's objective of peace. He further assured journalists that "all military measures" were taken against "the aggression and destabilization" of the Khmer Rouge. Whereas the Secretary-General formalistically reminded journalists that UNTAC was a peacekeeping operation and therefore not allowed to engage in peace enforcement, he made it clear that the use of force in defence of the mandate was entirely legitimised.<sup>152</sup> These statements were a long way from the policy of patient diplomacy Boutros-Ghali had advocated until then.

### Preparing for the worst

Hun Sen's offensive of January 1993 to reconquer lost territories brought CPAF troops within kilometres of the Khmer Rouge-controlled town of Pailin.<sup>153</sup> This seemed to create panic among Khmer Rouge officers who replied by confining all Pailin-based UNTAC personnel to their building, interdicting UNTAC helicopters to land in the area, and accusing an American UNMO of spying for the Vietnamese and Hun Sen, which was a statement as original as it was false. These restrictions and intimidations made Sanderson increasingly concerned about the safety of his team in Pailin which consisted of three UNMOs, three Australian radio operators and several UN mine specialists who were deployed to train the Cambodian factions' soldiers in demining.<sup>154</sup> Since the liaison office had never been very effective, the UNTAC presence in Pailin, in the middle of the Khmer Rouge zone, was primarily of symbolic significance. In practice, messages to the Khmer Rouge leadership were mostly delivered at their compound in Phnom Penh or through the UNMO-team located in the Dutch battalion's UNTAC enclave of Sok San, which was believed to be close to where the real Khmer Rouge decision makers, Pol Pot and Ieng Sary, held their

---

149 Powell, *A Long Road to Peace*, 38; Mark Dodd, "U.N. volunteers in Cambodia may stop work," *Reuters*, 9 April 1993; Robert Rideau, "APRONUC: Une mission originale à plus d'un titre," *Les Cahiers du Retex*, no. 3; Author's interview with Robert Rideau; Meeting on "Electoral Security" on 7 May 1993. See: Internal message Yahmed to Porcell, 18 May 1993, "Report on the 6<sup>th</sup> Civil Administration Seminar," ADN, 521PO/2 33.

150 "Japan may pull out of Cambodia, warns minister," *The Strait Times*, 10 April 1993.

151 "Khmer Rouge attacks may force troop pullout, says Evans," *The Strait Times*, 12 April 1993; "Australia undeterred by Khmer Rouge attacks -Evans," *Reuters*, 11 April 1993.

152 Press Release SG/SM/4967, 12 April 1993, AMBZ, BZ-14528.

153 Cable Akashi to Goulding, 24 January 1993, 24 January 1993, "Situation in Pailin," UNA, S-0794-0049-0003.

154 Cable Sanderson to Goulding, 11 January 1993, "situation in Battambang province," UNA, S-1829-0312-0001; Cable Akashi to Goulding, 24 January 1993, 24 January 1993, "Situation in Pailin," UNA, S-0794-0049-0003.

headquarters.<sup>155</sup>

Sanderson had been thinking about withdrawing his team from Pailin for some time as he was concerned for their safety in a situation where UNTAC and the Khmer Rouge were potentially heading for a confrontation. But the force commander realised that withdrawing the team from the Khmer Rouge's nominal but symbolic headquarters would reveal that contacts between UNTAC and the Khmer Rouge were deteriorating and signal that the Khmer Rouge were officially outside the peace process. "The problem with closing links with the DK is that it could be the end of the Paris Agreement," he explained generals of the CPAF on 1 February.<sup>156</sup> On 15 March, the force commander nonetheless decided to push for the evacuation of his unarmed team, using the excuse that they were running out of supplies, especially of fuel for their generator, which would make it impossible to generate electricity for radio communications with Phnom Penh, practically cutting them off.<sup>157</sup> Although the Khmer Rouge had forbidden UNTAC helicopters to land in Pailin, resupply through Thailand was still possible. Ultimately, the shortage of supplies was a pretext to conceal Sanderson's concerns for the safety of his team in the heart of Khmer Rouge-controlled territory. Taking the unarmed team hostage would be an easy tactic for the Khmer Rouge to sabotage the entire elections. The force commander made the point to Annan that "an UNTAC presence in a wholly NADK-controlled area could create significant risk if crises develop elsewhere in the coming months" to support his plea for a precautionary withdrawal.<sup>158</sup> Annan acknowledged the difficult situation of the UNTAC team but believed that it was nonetheless of "considerable political significance" to maintain an UNTAC presence in Pailin.<sup>159</sup> When consulted about the matter by Akashi, the P5 also unanimously agreed that it was a matter of principle that UNTAC should remain in Pailin until the end of the mission. France was the most vocal in declaring that it would be "a political mistake" to pull out of Pailin.<sup>160</sup> Boutros-Ghali felt that the team should only withdraw in case the situation would become intolerable, but left the decision to Akashi, who decided to maintain the status-quo as long as possible.<sup>161</sup>

Meanwhile, the Khmer Rouge hardened its rhetoric by the day. On 3 April, Khieu Samphan said in an interview with the *Far Eastern Economic Review* that the elections would never bring peace to Cambodia because they were a Western plot to destroy them, which was not totally false. He also warned that the situation would become "more unstable, more insecure, more confusing," and that attacks against Vietnamese living in Cambodia would increase.<sup>162</sup> At the same time, the SOC continued to pressure UNTAC to officially exclude the Khmer Rouge from the peace

---

155 Cable Sanderson to Annan, 28 April 1993, "Alternative liaison link with NADK," UNA, S-0794-0021-0001.

156 Discussion with CPAF delegates 1 February 1993, Sanderson Papers, ADFA, box 2, folder 8.

157 Minutes of the 31<sup>st</sup> meeting of the Mixed Military Working Group, 15 March 1993, UNA, S-0794-0022-0003.

158 Cable Sanderson to Annan, 15 March 1993, "Proposed withdrawal of UNTAC personnel from Pailin," UNA, S-0794-0050-0002. Also see: Cable Akashi (drafted by Lieutenant Colonel Healy) to Annan, 29 March 1993, "proposed withdrawal of UNTAC personnel from Pailin," UNA, S-0794-0050-0002.

159 Cable Annan to Akashi, 18 March 1993, "Proposed withdrawal of UNTAC personnel from Pailin," UNA, S-0794-0045-0002.

160 Cable Akashi to Annan, 30 March 1993, "Core group meeting," UNA, S-0794-0050-0002; Cable Annan to Akashi, 24 March 1993, "Meetings with P5 and Thai Ambassador regarding Pailin," UNA, S-0794-0045-0002.

161 Cable Annan to Akashi, 31 March 1993, "Situation in Pailin," UNA, S-0794-0045-0002.

162 Nate Thayer, "Bloody Agenda: Khmer Rouge set out to wreck planned elections," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 15 April 1993.

process.<sup>163</sup> Sanderson, who after the deadly attacks on his peacekeepers began to lose his usual optimism, told Akashi that it might be time to accede to this request in order not to alienate the SOC from UNTAC.<sup>164</sup> Akashi came very close in doing this at the SNC meeting on 10 April, when he stated that the Khmer Rouge had “taken a dangerous step towards outlaw status.” He warned that Khmer Rouge leaders would be held directly responsible for all attacks they would dare to commit, and threatened that the world would not forgive them if they were to disrupt the elections.<sup>165</sup> The Khmer Rouge responded dramatically by announcing the closure of their office in Phnom Penh and withdrawal from the capital. In the morning of 13 April, a convoy of Khmer Rouge officials and their bodyguards left their compound in the city centre and quickly drove to the airport where they boarded the first flight to Bangkok. Khmer Rouge officials declared that it was not safe for them to stay in Phnom Penh because Akashi had described them as outlaws. In an attempt to deescalate and demonstrate UNTAC’s continued impartiality, Akashi promised Khieu Samphan special UNTAC-security, but this offer was declined.<sup>166</sup>

The Khmer Rouge return to the shadow of the jungle where they had stayed throughout the 1980s, signalled their definitive withdrawal from the peace process. This reinforced Akashi’s belief that the removal of UNTAC’s UNMOs in Pailin would give the wrong signal as it could create the impression that the situation was escalating towards open conflict with the Khmer Rouge.<sup>167</sup> This was possible because the fuel supply appeared to hold out after all. However, on 21 April, Australian foreign minister Evans surprised everyone by stating at a press conference in Canberra that the UN team in Pailin would be withdrawn on 29 April because of the deteriorating security situation and “the manifest inability of the election being able to take place there,” which confirms that Australia’s concerns for the safety of its own personnel in Pailin played an important role in Sanderson’s considerations. The UNTAC spokesperson reacted surprised and immediately clarified that no such decision had been taken yet.<sup>168</sup> Intentionally or not, Evans’ announcement put pressure on Akashi to act accordingly. On 29 April, Sanderson informed New York that the UNTAC team would be withdrawn from Pailin the next day.<sup>169</sup> The Dutch enclave in Sok San now remained the only link with the Khmer Rouge.<sup>170</sup> It was not the first time Akashi was overruled on the question of an UNTAC military presence inside Khmer Rouge-controlled territory. The force commander again received cover from his foreign minister who unsubtly tried to influence operational decisions and push the operation into a direction that, also in this case, went against

163 Letter Ambassador Ouch Borith (SOC) to the United Nations Secretary-General, 7 April 1993, ADN, 10POI/1 1312; Declaration of the State of Cambodia, 5 January 1993, AMBZ, BZ 01729.

164 Interoffice memorandum Sanderson to Akashi, 5 April 1993, “Killing of Bulgarian Soldiers at Phum Prek on 2 April 1993,” UNA, S-0794-0021-0001; Cable French Ambassador Phnom Penh to Paris, 7 April 1993, “Attaques contre l’APRONUC – pessimisme du général Sanderson,” ADN, 10POI/1 1302.

165 Safety and security of the electoral process, statement by Mr. Akashi, 10 April 1993, UNA, S-0794-0051-0001; “Akashi – KR a step closer to outlaw status,” *Bangkok Post*, 12 April 1993.

166 Nate Thayer, “Rumours of War: conflict looms after Khmer Rouge pullout,” *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 22 April 1993; Jennar, *Chroniques Cambodgiennes*, 418.

167 Cable French Ambassador Phnom Penh to Paris, 26 March 1993, “attitude de l’APRONUC sur la question de Pailin,” ADN, 10POI/1 1312; Cable French Ambassador Phnom Penh to Paris, 23 April 1993, “Berets bleus à Pailin,” ADN, 10POI/1 1312.

168 Tony Wright, “Aust pullout shocks UNTAC,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 April 1993; Lindsay Murdoch and Geoffrey Barker, “UN, Evans At Odds,” *The Age*, 22 April 1993; Horner and Connor, *The Good International Citizen*, 201; Cable French Ambassador Phnom Penh to Paris, 23 April 1993, “Berets bleus à Pailin,” ADN, 10POI/1 1312.

169 Cable Sanderson to Annan, 29 April 1993, “UNTAC presence in Pailin,” UNA, S-0794-0021-0001.

170 Cable Sanderson to Annan, 28 April 1993, “Alternative liaison link with NADK,” UNA, S-0794-0021-0001.



the will of the P5 members of the Security Council, and again, in particular against the French position.

Although the Khmer Rouge leaders had gone underground, the forces under their command could not be ignored. With an estimated total of 15,000 soldiers, the Khmer Rouge's military capabilities were considered as substantial.<sup>171</sup> The guerrillas were conducting a psychological war, leaving everyone in doubt about their intentions and real strength. They started a fierce anti-UNTAC campaign through the distribution of leaflets calling on all Cambodians to oppose UNTAC, telling villagers that blood would flow on election day and that polling stations were going to be shelled with artillery. Their radio broadcasts continued to claim that UNTAC was in league with the Vietnamese and their puppets in Phnom Penh.<sup>172</sup> UNTAC also received information that the Khmer Rouge were redeploying in preparation of a confrontation. It seemed that at least eighty of the NADK commanding officers had been replaced, and fresh recruits were spotted in new uniforms and with new weapons. The Khmer Rouge were also seen moving a large number of artillery pieces and heavy mortars around the country, causing the concern that they were indeed planning to target certain polling sites.<sup>173</sup> In some villages ordinary Cambodians were offered 500 Thai Baht by the Khmer Rouge for firing an RPG at designated targets.<sup>174</sup> The Khmer Rouge had also stolen many white-painted UNTAC cars, creating the fear that these would be used as trojan horses in attacks.<sup>175</sup>

However, in the end, not many officers at UNTAC headquarters believed that the Khmer Rouge would actually dare to mount a largescale attack on the elections for the reason that this would simply cost them too many of their soldiers. Prince Sihanouk, for his part, was also convinced that the Khmer Rouge would do their utmost to prevent the elections from taking place, but did not think they could actually do it.<sup>176</sup> Nonetheless, even small attacks on polling sites on the first election day could scare off enough Cambodians to go vote, which would either force the cancellation of the elections altogether or seriously endanger the credibility of a free and fair result. It was clear that UNTAC's soft spot was the civilian personnel that operated the voting booths in remote parts of the countryside.<sup>177</sup> On 17 April, Akashi cabled to New York that "the fact must be faced that it would be both relatively easy and very effective for the DK to mount murderous atrocities against UNTAC civilian staff if they considered that this was their last best chance to stop the elections." Akashi realised that if such a scenario would occur, the UN might have no other choice than to further escalate the situation by "requesting the Security Council to consider radical and effective counter-measures."<sup>178</sup> Akashi was thus not planning to call for

---

171 Exposé fait par le Colonel Pinatel (chef bureau d'information) aux commandants de secteur et responsables électoraux, 27 April 1993, UNA, S-0794-0020-0002.

172 Interoffice memorandum Carney to Akashi, "PDK Campaign of Intimidation: positioning for violence," UNA, S-0794-0051-0001; Interoffice memorandum Heder to Carney, 25 April 1993, "More PDK Leaflets from Kampung Cham Province," ADN, 521 PO/2/31.

173 Highlights of the UNTAC Information Working Group Meeting, 20 April 1993, subject: "Changes in the Politico-Military Situation and implications for Election and UNTAC Security," ADN, 521PO/2/33.

174 Cable Colonel Huijssoon to The Hague, 24 May 1993, "Info Cambodja," NIMH-099, folder 68.

175 Meeting Sanderson with General Ke Kim Yan commander-in-chief of the Cambodian People's Armed Forces, Phnom Penh UNTAC HQ, 20 April 1993, UNA, S-0794-0021-0001.

176 Jacques Bekaert, "Sihanouk: Bid to block poll will test KR strength," *Bangkok Post*, 20 April 1993.

177 Exposé fait par le Colonel Pinatel, UNA, S-0794-0020-0002; Cable Akashi to Annan, 3 May 1993, "Military/political assessment of DK capacity and intentions," UNA, S-0794-0051-0001.

178 Cable Akashi to Annan, 17 April 1993, "Possible measures to improve security conditions," UNA, S-1829-0272-0002.

UNTAC's withdrawal in case of serious Khmer Rouge attacks, but rather seemed supportive of transforming the nature of the UN operation.

Meanwhile, Khmer Rouge attacks on UNTAC reached a new level of intensity. On 1 May, four hand grenades were thrown into the Dutch compound in Thum Tma Pok in Banteay Meanchey province, severely injuring one marine.<sup>179</sup> On 3 May, five Indian soldiers were injured when their patrol came under fire in Kompong Cham, near the place where a Colombian civilian police officer had been killed earlier.<sup>180</sup> That same night, the important provincial capital of Siem Reap, located near the temples of Angkor Wat, suffered an attack of an unprecedented scale. At three o'clock in the morning, some 500 Khmer Rouge troops launched an assault on the town from five directions. The attack did not come as a surprise as Khmer Rouge forces had been taking up positions around Siem Reap for months. But instead of directly moving on the CPAF headquarters, which seemed to be the logical target, the Khmer Rouge first captured the airfield, and then attacked the position of UNTAC's logistic company from Poland. The Poles immediately returned extensive fire on the attackers, alerting the CPAF forces who were fully taken by surprise. After six hours of fighting in the early morning, CPAF reinforcements arrived and eventually succeeded in pushing the Khmer Rouge out of the town.<sup>181</sup> Thirteen Khmer Rouge, one CPAF soldier and four civilians were killed.<sup>182</sup> After the attack, Sanderson said to the ambassadors in Phnom Penh that the logistic unit from Poland had probably prevented Siem Reap from falling into Khmer Rouge hands.<sup>183</sup> The Poles had defended themselves bravely, but the attack exposed the extent to which UNTAC was dependent on the CPAF to protect itself, the Cambodian population and the electoral process. Sanderson met with CPAF General Meas Sophea to whom he expressed his concern that more attacks of this scale might cause serious problems for the conduct of the elections, but Meas Sophea assured the force commander that his army had the capacity to defend the town.<sup>184</sup> The Indonesian Benny Widyono, who was UNTAC's civilian head in Siem Reap, later remembered how he felt that the failure of the demobilisation process was "a blessing in disguise" as CPAF forces eventually chased the Khmer Rouge out of "his" town. But SOC defence minister, General Tea Banh, mockingly reminded Widyono that it was not the task of his army to protect UNTAC positions and that, according to the Paris Agreements, his army was not even allowed to engage the Khmer Rouge.<sup>185</sup> The remark indeed illustrated the paradoxical situation and the degree to which UNTAC's final objective had become dependent on the State of Cambodia's protection.

UNTAC was not given the time to recover from the shock the attack on Siem Reap had

---

179 Bijzondere melding Koninklijke Marechaussee, 2 May 1993, SIB, MARSTAF-UNTAC, box 1232, file 24.

180 Cable Akashi to Annan, 3 May 1993, "Military/political assessment of DK capacity and intentions," UNA, S-0794-0051-0001.

181 Meeting with Phnom Penh Ambassadors on Siem Reap (& other) incidents, UNTAC HQ, Wednesday 5 May 1993, UNA, S-0794-0021-0001; Cable French Ambassador Phnom Penh to Paris, 4 May 1993, "attaque de Siem Reap par les forces de la PDK (nuit du 3 au 4 mai)," ADN, 10POI/1 1312; Widyono, *Dancing in Shadows*, 104; Kevin Barrington, "Security Concerns Loom Over Polls," *The Phnom Penh Post*, 21 May 1993.

182 Verbatim notes of force commander's meeting with General Meas Sophea of CPAF, UNTAC HQ, Monday 3 May 1993, UNA, S-0794-0021-0001.

183 Meeting with Phnom Penh Ambassadors on Siem Reap (& other) incidents, UNTAC HQ, Wednesday 5 May 1993, UN Archives, New York, S-0794-0021-0001.

184 Verbatim notes of force commander's meeting with General Meas Sophea of CPAF, UNTAC HQ, Monday 3 May 1993, UNA, S-0794-0021-0001.

185 Widyono, *Dancing in Shadows*, 106-7.

caused. A day later, an UNTAC convoy ran into a well-prepared ambush set by the Khmer Rouge in Banteay Meanchey province, close to the Thai border. The convoy, consisting of six vehicles with a mine clearing team from India, an election team, five Japanese civilian police officers, and escorted by a group of Dutch marines, drove from the village of Phum Ku to Phum Ampil. Shortly after passing a Khmer Rouge checkpoint, the leading Dutch vehicle was suddenly hit by an RPG. Although damaged, the Land Rover managed to speed away, but the following two cars of the Japanese civilian police were trapped and sprayed with small arms fire from both sides of the road. While the other cars in the convoy managed to turn around and drive out of the firing zone, five Dutch peacekeepers and three Japanese civilian police were seriously wounded. One Japanese officer was killed.<sup>186</sup> Shortly after the attack, Khmer Rouge radio traffic was intercepted saying: “Vive [les] Khmers Rouges! We will continue to kill UNTAC.”<sup>187</sup> The next attack followed only hours after the ambush in Banteay Meanchey, when the Khmer Rouge opened fire with mortars and RPGs on the UNTAC camp in Kompong Thom province which was shared by Polish logistic troops and Chinese engineers. For a second time, it was the Poles who succeeded in pushing back the Khmer Rouge by effectively returning fire. The event was symbolic because it was the first time that Chinese forces were attacked by their former allies.<sup>188</sup> “They really have no friends left,” an Asian diplomat in Phnom Penh commented.<sup>189</sup>

The Khmer Rouge ambush in Banteay Meanchey caused special concern at UNTAC headquarters because it raised the question whether elections could be held in these areas which were theoretically under the control of ANKI and KNPLAF.<sup>190</sup> The area where the Dutch-escorted convoy was ambushed was the centre of ANKI-controlled territory, but the Khmer Rouge was all around in this north-western corner of the country, known as the “liberated zone.” It seemed that the Khmer Rouge was now attempting to dominate this area and establish a supply-corridor between the northern part of Cambodia and the western Khmer Rouge heartland.<sup>191</sup> If ambushes on UNTAC convoys were to continue, it would be difficult to proceed with the elections in areas outside the SOC-controlled territory, which would make it hard for UNTAC to claim that the elections were “free and fair.”<sup>192</sup>

Shortly after the death of the Japanese police officer, the Japanese minister for home affairs, Keijiro Murata, travelled to Phnom Penh to express Tokyo’s concerns about the safety of Japanese

---

186 Ten Cate et al., *Qua patet orbis*, 91; Report from the ambush on the road between Phum Ampil and Phum Ku 4 May 1993 & message Dutchbatt HQ to UNTAC HQ, 4 May 1993, SIB, MARSTAF-UNTAC, box 1232, file 24; Meeting with Phnom Penh Ambassadors on Siem Reap (& other) incidents, UNTAC HQ, Wednesday 5 May 1993, UNA, S-0794-0021-0001.

187 SIT investigation report on the ambush on Route 691 (Sector 1) on 04 May 1993, 8 May 1993, UNA, S-1854-0072-0004.

188 Meeting with Phnom Penh Ambassadors on Siem Reap (& other) incidents, UNTAC HQ, Wednesday 5 May 1993, UNA, S-0794-0021-0001.

189 Philip Shenon, “Khmer Rouge Said to Attack Chinese Peacekeepers,” *The New York Times*, 6 May 1993.

190 Meeting with Phnom Penh Ambassadors on Siem Reap (& other) incidents, UNTAC HQ, Wednesday 5 May 1993, UNA, S-0794-0021-0001.

191 Cable Netherlands ambassador Bangkok to The Hague, 6 May 1993, “kambodja, nederlandse gewonden weerspiegelen machtsverschuiving in de ‘liberated zone’,” AMBZ, BZ 14534; Nate Thayer, “Shot to pieces,” *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 20 May 1993, 11.

192 Meeting with Phnom Penh Ambassadors on Siem Reap (& other) incidents, UNTAC HQ, Wednesday 5 May 1993, UNA, S-0794-0021-0001. Exposé fait par le Colonel Pinatel (chef bureau d’information) aux commandants de secteur et responsables électoraux, 27 April 1993, UNA, S-0794-0020-00002; Cable Akashi to Annan, 3 May 1993, “Military/political assessment of DK capacity and intentions,” UNA, S-0794-0051-0001.

police officers and requested Akashi to call them back to Phnom Penh for a security briefing, and subsequently redeploy them to safer zones. Akashi refused and ordered all Japanese personnel to remain at their posts.<sup>193</sup> Hiroto Yamazaki, the senior Japanese civilian police officer in Cambodia, did not share his government's concerns. "Much of Cambodia is dangerous at this point," he told journalists in Phnom Penh, making it clear that his men would continue to do their work despite the threat of violence. "If we abandon our duty, it is really disgraceful," he added.<sup>194</sup> The nervousness of the Japanese government was also resisted by countries from the region, such as Singapore. A few days after the Japanese police officer was killed in the Banteay Meanchey-ambush, Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong visited Tokyo and publicly warned the Japanese government that now was not the time to think about pulling back troops from Cambodia. "We all knew it was not going to be a picnic," he stated, adding that a Japanese withdrawal from Cambodia would imply that Tokyo had decided not to play the international role it was aspiring.<sup>195</sup> The prime minister also made the point that UN forces in Cambodia should be equipped not only to keep the peace, but also to impose it by force if necessary.<sup>196</sup> Although Singapore had only a small contingent of personnel deployed with UNTAC, the government decided to send four Puma helicopters to Cambodia in support of the elections.<sup>197</sup>

The notion that UNTAC should be reinforced received increasing support. The core group discussed the matter with Sanderson, but the force commander advised against it for several reasons. The practical argument was that such a force would probably not arrive on time and cause additional logistical problems. It was also considered complicated to reinforce the existing peacekeeping battalions with troops from other countries. But these problems were not unsurmountable, and arguments of a more political-strategic nature were probably of greater significance. Within UNTAC's military staff, the argument was made, in general terms, that a request to member states to contribute more troops to the operation might give the impression that the situation in Cambodia was derailing. Chances were considered slim that UN member states would be willing to continue to support a mission where there was no longer a peace to keep.<sup>198</sup> On what information this presumption was based is unclear, but it was contradicted by the resolve and determination demonstrated by countries from the region to see the operation through to the end, no matter what happened. Kuala Lumpur, again, was particularly vocal in expressing this. Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad called on the UN to prepare for the possibility of war in Cambodia, saying he wanted to avoid that the Malaysian battalion would be caught unprepared if the situation was to escalate into a full-fledged conflict. "If they decide to face the war, they must ensure that the peacekeeping force has adequate supplies and arms," the prime minister stated, adding that any UN decision to alter the nature of their duties

---

193 Cable Annan to Akashi, 6 May 1993, "Japanese demarche," UNA, S-1829-0272-0002; Philip Shenon, "Japan Presses U.N. on Cambodia Peril," *The New York Times*, 11 May 1993; Cable Netherlands Embassy Tokyo to The Hague, 12 May 1993, "Kambodja / vermeende terugtrekking Japan," AMBZ, 01728.

194 Shenon, "Japan Presses U.N. on Cambodia Peril."

195 Ibid.

196 Cable French Ambassador Singapore to Paris, 13 May 1993, "Cambodge – fermeté Singapourienne," ADN, 10POI/1 1302.

197 Cable French Ambassador Singapore to Paris, 21 May 1993, "envoi de quatre Super-Puma au Cambodge," ADN, 10POI/1 1302.

198 Interoffice memorandum Colonel Huijssoon to Akashi, 15 April 1993, "reinforcement of the military component," UNA, S-1854-0027-0001.

would be supported by Kuala Lumpur.<sup>199</sup> In addition to the call for more military equipment, the Malaysian government also proposed to discuss changing UNTAC's mandate.<sup>200</sup> Kuala Lumpur took the initiative to contact other countries that contributed troops to Cambodia and proposed to collectively invite Boutros-Ghali to reinforce UNTAC with heavier materiel, such as armoured cars.<sup>201</sup> As the proposal received a lukewarm reaction from non-Asian troop contributing countries, it was eventually downsized to an ASEAN request to the Secretary-General to undertake measures to improve and strengthen the security of UN personnel in Cambodia.<sup>202</sup> The most important reason, however, for Sanderson to refrain from demanding reinforcements, was to keep the Khmer Rouge passive. The force commander made it clear that he was concerned that bringing in reinforcements could provoke rather than deter the Khmer Rouge.<sup>203</sup>

Whereas calling in reinforcements was considered a bridge too far, the measures that were taken in defence of the elections led to a transformation of UNTAC into a more robust force that was ready for a military confrontation. Akashi told the core group ambassadors in Phnom Penh that he was "hoping for the best while preparing for the worst."<sup>204</sup> The fear of a serious deterioration of the security situation was illustrated by the fact that every day UNTAC headquarters in Phnom Penh began to look more like a fortress and all UNTAC military staff personnel working there, who normally never carried weapons, were now issued with sidearms. Family members of all UN personnel were ordered out of the country.<sup>205</sup> UNTAC battalions were ordered to reinforce their positions with bunkers and fire bays.<sup>206</sup> The number of polling stations was reduced from 1,900 to 1,400 in order to limit their exposure to attacks. The measure was initially resisted by UNTAC's electoral component, but Akashi disregarded what he believed was "stubborn perfectionism."<sup>207</sup> Contingents were expected to increase their patrols in the densely populated areas in their sector and create a quick reaction force – in case they hadn't already – to respond to emergencies. In Sanderson's absence, Deputy Force Commander Rideau strengthened UNTAC's reserve force in Phnom Penh with a quick reaction force consisting of 150 French legionnaires with helicopters

---

199 "Prepare Untac force for war, Dr M tells UN," *New Straits Times*, 16 April 1993; Letter by Malaysian Ambassador Phnom Penh to Akashi, 16 April 1993, "Views of the Prime Minister of Malaysia," UNA, S-0794-0009-0002.

200 Cable French Ambassador Kuala Lumpur to Paris, 16 April 1993, "Cambodge – réactions malaisiennes après les déclarations de M. Evans et les derniers événements," ADN, 10POI/1 1302; "Malaysia: Elections must go on," *New Straits Times*, 15 April 1993.

201 Cable Netherlands PR New York to The Hague, 23 April 1993, "Kambodja UNTAC voorstel Maleisië voor demarche inzake veiligheid VN-troepen," AMBZ, BZ-1304; Cable French PR New York to Paris, 26 April 1993, "Cambodge," ADN, 10POI/1 1302.

202 Cable Annan to Akashi, 15 May 1993, "Security," UNA, S-1829-0272-0002; Cable Netherlands PR New York to The Hague, 3 May 1993, "Kambodja UNTAC voorstel Maleisië voor demarche inzake veiligheid VN-troepen," AMBZ, BZ-1304; Cable Akashi to Annan, 11 May 1993, "Meeting with the Expanded Permanent Five," UNA, S-0794-0051-0002.

203 Cable Sanderson to Annan, 30 April 1993, "US Demarche – approach on additional assistance by Phnom Penh ambassadors," UNA, S-0794-0021-0001.

204 Meeting with the core group, 9 April 1993, UNA, S-0794-0051-0001.

205 Order by Brigadier General Tuswandi, Chief of Staff, 15 May 1993, "Arming of non-formed unit personnel (less UNMOS and UNNOS)," UNA, S-0794-0020-0002; Johan ten Hove, "Untac gokt op 'beetje eerlijke' verkiezingen," *Trouw*, 18 May 1993.

206 Rideau, "APRONUC: Une mission originale à plus d'un titre"; Author's interview with Robert Rideau; Interoffice memorandum by Rideau, Moné, Gibney, 18 April 1993, "Coordination at Sector level," UNA, S-0997-0006-0003; Cable Akashi to Annan, 28 April 1993, "Draft Fourth Progress Report," UNA, S-0794-0050-0023

207 Akashi, "The Challenge of Peacekeeping in Cambodia," 209.

at their disposal, ready to go anywhere, anytime.<sup>208</sup> In order to guarantee a twenty-four-hour information bridge between New York and Phnom Penh, Sanderson sent two of his staff officers to the Department of Peacekeeping Operations to man a special Cambodia desk.<sup>209</sup> Sanderson and Rideau both made several tours around the country to inspect the military readiness of their battalions. Some battalion commanders expressed a reluctance to accept anything that looked like a robust military posture which they substantiated by referring to the limitations of UNTAC's mandate. According to Rideau, much persuasion and "pedagogy" was needed to counter such legalistic arguments.<sup>210</sup>

Whereas limitations of the mandate had previously been emphasised in explaining UNTAC's passivity, there were now reasons to interpret the mandate less restrictively. With regard to the rules of engagement, UNTAC headquarters circulated a message to all battalions that entitled peacekeepers to open fire in a wide variety of situations, including in defence of the mandate.<sup>211</sup> Akashi insisted that the notion of self-defence should be interpreted "fairly liberally."<sup>212</sup> At a press briefing in Phnom Penh he declared that although peacekeepers were restricted to use force in self-defence, he emphasised that "this very much includes the right to defend our mission." He further underlined UNTAC's robust posture by stating that "we do not hesitate to return fire vigorously if attacked."<sup>213</sup> To his staff members, Akashi said that the military strength of the Khmer Rouge should not be underestimated and that UNTAC had to be prepared to put on a fight.<sup>214</sup>

Sanderson realised that it would be impossible to provide absolute security in all Cambodian provinces, but after his tours around the different sectors, he expressed confidence that attacks could be repulsed.<sup>215</sup> His faith must have been strengthened by the fact that UNTAC troops did demonstrate strength in fending off the continuing Khmer Rouge attacks. On 8 May, a company of Pakistani peacekeepers located in Choam Khsan in Preah Vihear province, came under attack by Khmer Rouge forces that attacked in three subsequent waves. All were driven back by heavy Pakistani counterfire. Whereas one blue helmet was seriously injured, two Khmer Rouges were confirmed killed. Sanderson was pleased with how well the Pakistani had defended themselves and considered it as a sign of UNTAC's determination to maintain its presence in contested areas.<sup>216</sup> More examples of UNTAC's increased military readiness followed. A week

---

208 Barrington, "Security Concerns Loom Over Polls"; Cable Huijssoon to The Hague, 24 May 1993, "Info Cambodja," NIMH-099, folder 68.

209 Cable Sanderson to Annan, 20 April 1993, "passage of information," UNA, S-0794-0021-0001; Interoffice memorandum Sanderson to Baril, 5 May 1993, "UNTAC liaison to United Nations, New York," UNA, S-0795-0056-0002.

210 Rideau, "APRONUC: Une mission originale à plus d'un titre"; Author's interview with Robert Rideau.

211 Cable Akashi to Annan, 17 April 1993, "Possible measures to improve security conditions," UNA, S-1829-0272-0002; Cable Goulding to Akashi, Anstee, Kittani, Nambiar, Ajello, Riza, Wahlgren, Dibumana, Minehane, Misztal, Thapa, Galarza-Chans, Van Baelen, 20 January 1993, "United Nations Rules of Engagement: Statements to the Media," UNA, S-0795-0043-0004.

212 Cable Akashi to Annan, 12 May 1993, "Draft of the Secretary-General's Report on the Implementation of Security Council Resolution 810 (1993)," UNA, S-1829-0272-0002; Cable Akashi to Annan, 14 May 1993, "Revised draft of the Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council Resolution 810 (1993)," UNA, S-1829-0272-0002.

213 Daily Press Briefing, 20 May 1993, UNA, S-0794-0036-0004.

214 "Khmer Rouge tougher, stronger than ever: U.N.," *AFP*, 19 May 1993.

215 Meeting on "Electoral Security" on 7 May 1993. See: Internal message Yahmed to Porcell, 18 May 1993, "Report on the 6<sup>th</sup> Civil Administration Seminar," ADN, 521PO/2/33.

216 Meeting Sanderson with General Meas Sophea of CPAF, UNTAC HQ Phnom Penh, 18 May 1993, UNA, S-0794-0021-0001.



later, an Indonesian patrol ran into a firefight with the Khmer Rouge. The Indonesians not only defended themselves robustly, but even pursued the fleeing guerrillas, wounding two of them.<sup>217</sup> The day before the elections, the Khmer Rouge continued to demonstrate their recklessness by opening fire on the compound of a Chinese UNTAC engineer company located at the village of Skon in Kompong Cham province. Two Chinese blue berets were instantly killed when an RPG penetrated the barracks through an open window and exploded inside.<sup>218</sup> The Chinese engineers were traumatised, and Beijing demanded that they were moved to a secure location where they could continue their road-building work in safety. Sanderson and Akashi exceptionally agreed, probably in the hope that the Chinese government would put pressure on the Khmer Rouge to refrain from further violence.<sup>219</sup>

The militarisation of the peacekeeping operation was symbolised by the fact that the United States started to play a bigger role in the phase leading up to the elections. With the situation in Cambodia deteriorating, the Americans began to monitor the operation more closely and provide it with greater support. Two weeks before the elections, the US government established a special working group on Cambodia that followed the situation on a twenty-four-hour basis. US officials regularly visited DPKO to give “intelligence briefings” about Cambodia, despite the unwritten rule at the UN to always employ the more neutral term “information” because of the organisation’s impartial position.<sup>220</sup> This rule, however, was temporarily thrown overboard, apparently the situation demanded so. On 6 May, a US government delegation, consisting of Admiral Frank Bowman and former Assistant Secretary of State for Political-Military Affairs Richard Clarke, visited Annan at UN headquarters in New York, and made it clear to the DPKO-chief that the United States was not prepared to see the Khmer Rouge succeed in sabotaging the elections. They urged the UN to make sure UNTAC stood up to the attacks, stiffen its resolve and avoid that certain areas would be disenfranchised during the elections. The Americans offered to procure and transport extra military equipment to Cambodia, not as a pro bono contribution but at the “cheapest Department of Defense rate.”<sup>221</sup> Sanderson had already sent his wish list to New York: he required additional helicopters for medical evacuation, thirty mine-resistant vehicles, night-vision goggles and equipment for personal protection such as body armour and helmets.<sup>222</sup>

The talks in New York about shipping more military materiel to Cambodia exemplify how strong the mentality shifted towards a preparedness for escalation. Initially, the UN Secretariat had discouraged battalions to bring capabilities to Cambodia that were considered too robust. The French had decided to equip their battalion with Armed Personnel Carriers (APCs), or *Véhicules*

---

217 Brocades Zaalberg, *Soldiers and Civil Power*, 138; Cable Huijssoon to The Hague, 24 May 1993, “Info Cambodja,” NIMH-099, folder 68.

218 Interoffice memorandum Lt Col Suresh Nair to Force Commander, 23 May 1993, “Investigation report on the killing of two Chinese construction coy soldiers at Skon Wu 0938, Sector 5E on 22 May 1993,” UNA, S-1854-0072-0005; UNMO Sector 5 East to UNTAC HQ, 22 May 1993, “detailed report on incident at Chinese engineer company location at Skon on 21 May 93,” UNA, S-0794-0045-0002.

219 Cable Sanderson to Annan, 23 May 1993, “Demarche by Chinese ambassador to the SNC,” UNA, S-1829-0270-0007.

220 Cable Annan to Akashi, 11 May 1993, “Intelligence Briefing,” UNA, S-0794-0045-0003.

221 Cable Annan to Akashi, 6 May 1993, “Meeting with United States officials regarding preparations for election and offer of logistic support,” UNA, S-1829-0272-0002.

222 Cable Sanderson to Annan, 30 April 1993, “US Demarche – approach on additional assistance by Phnom Penh ambassadors,” UNA, S-0794-0021-0001.

*de l'Avant Blindé* (VAB) in French, in order to be prepared for a higher threat level. But the UN Secretariat protested against the use of these vehicles, judging them as appearing unnecessarily aggressive, and refused to reimburse Paris. France nonetheless decided to ship the vehicles to Cambodia anyway, at its own charge.<sup>223</sup> Ironically, in the summer of 1992, it was determined that in case of a degrading security situation in Phnom Penh, the French APCs would be the first to rush from Sihanoukville to the Cambodian capital to re-establish order.<sup>224</sup> Now that the entire context had considerably worsened, the UNTAC mission was actively reinforced and supplied. Two aircraft of the US Air Force brought 5,000 body armour jackets, 19,000 helmets, 15,000 medical dressings and 5,400 flares.<sup>225</sup> Fifteen mine-resistant vehicles were flown in from Namibia.<sup>226</sup> As the US delivered, Japan paid the bill of 1.1 million US dollars for the additional security items and the transportation costs, as well as for chartering eight additional helicopters, making the UNTAC air-fleet grow to a total of sixty-eight helicopters.<sup>227</sup> Australia also contributed six UH-60 Blackhawk helicopters.<sup>228</sup> Prime Minister Keating, who had just been re-elected on 13 March, suddenly seemed much less concerned about the safety of Australian personnel and justified this additional contribution by stating that "it is important that the international community holds its nerve and supports UNTAC during the crucial period in the lead-up to the elections." A bipartisan political consensus had developed in Canberra around the idea that the success of the operation was of vital importance to Australia's foreign policy.<sup>229</sup>

The protection of international civilian personnel that manned the polling stations was the highest priority for UNTAC's military component, but scepticism remained whether all battalions would be equally able to withstand attacks. Besides the essential 645 UNVs and 50,000 Cambodian electoral workers, some 882 International Polling Station Officers (IPSOs) from forty-four different countries volunteered to come to Cambodia to supervise the elections. Given the rapidly deteriorating security situation, some countries that sent IPSOs expressed great concerns for the safety of their national experts and requested UNTAC to send them to a sector where their own military was also deployed, if they had any troops in Cambodia.<sup>230</sup> Although New York initially resisted such requests, some countries eventually succeeded in getting their IPSOs deployed in the sector of their preference, as was the case with the Dutch in the province

---

223 François Trucy, *Rapport au Premier Ministre: Participation de la France aux Opérations de Maintien de la Paix* (1994), 153 (consulted in the library of the French Senate, Paris). France has experienced many problems in obtaining the reimbursements for its contributions to UN peacekeeping operations. See: Paul Tavernier, *Les casques bleus* (Paris: presses universitaires de France, 1996), 119.

224 Message Irastorza to Sanderson, 20 July 1992, "Plan Kiri," UNA, S-1854-0016-0008.

225 Statement by spokesperson of the US Department of State, May 12, 1993, "US Assistance to UNTAC," UNA, S-1854-0016-001.

226 Horner and Connor, *The Good International Citizen*, 204; Cable Colonel Huijssoon to The Hague, 24 May 1993, "Info Cambodja," NIMH-099, folder 68.

227 Cable Netherlands PR New York to The Hague, 24 May 1993, "Kambodja / vrijwillige bijdrage Japan t.b.v. veiligheid UNTAC," AMBZ, 01728.

228 Letter US Ambassador Phnom Penh to Sanderson, 11 May 1993, UNA, S-0794-0051-0002; Letter US Ambassador Phnom Penh to Akashi, 12 May 1993, UNA, S-0794-0009-0001. Horner and Connor, *The Good International Citizen*, 204.

229 Frost, *The Peace Process in Cambodia*, 46; Ian PePhedran, "Choppers, troops for Cambodia Aussie forces boosted," *The Canberra Times*, 11 May 1993; Cable French Ambassador Canberra to Paris, 21 May 1993, "Activisme Australien au Cambodge," ADN, 10POI/1 1302.

230 Cable Annan to Akashi, 15 April 1993, "Deployment of IPSOs," UNA, S-0794-0045-0002.

of Banteay Meanchey and the Japanese in Takeo province.<sup>231</sup> But it appeared impossible to accept all requests, and UNTAC's refusal to deploy the sixty-seven French IPSOs in the French sector led to some concern in Paris and among the French polling officers themselves.<sup>232</sup> Eventually, the French decided to take measures into their own hands by secretly deploying a group of special forces to Cambodia in order to protect the French IPSOs that worked outside the French sector. The French commandos, wearing blue berets, discretely entered Cambodia and took up covert positions in the vicinity of the polling stations.<sup>233</sup> But one of the French squads was spotted and halted by a British UNMO who immediately informed UNTAC headquarters, where Sanderson was obviously unpleasantly surprised.<sup>234</sup> The French special operation, organised with the collaboration of Rideau, uncovers a number of issues. First, how strained the working relation between the force commander and his French deputy continued to be. Second, the extent to which an escalation of the situation was considered as a realistic scenario by the French. Third, the lack of French confidence in some UNTAC units to provide for sufficient protection at the polling stations.<sup>235</sup> In preparing themselves for the worst-case scenario and protecting their nationals, the French preferred not to gamble and were willing to go as far as circumventing the UN command structures.

### **Cambodianisation and voting in safe areas**

The French were probably correct in their appraisal that UNTAC alone was not strong enough to provide a watertight protection against Khmer Rouge attacks. A solution for UNTAC's limited military strength was found in subcontracting the cooperating Cambodian factions in the active defence of the mission. In practical terms, this strategy amounted to a Cambodianisation of the UN operation. From February 1993 onwards, UNTAC's military staff had started to work out plans to involve the only army in Cambodia that was capable to protect the electoral process against the Khmer Rouge. The first idea was that Hun Sen's CPAF, together with the armies of the other two cooperating factions, would transfer allegiance from their faction to the Supreme National Council, and set the first steps towards the creation of a new national Cambodian army. This would allow UNTAC to "hire" a security force of 145,000 troops to help with the protection of the elections and provide security in the period thereafter. Although the two smaller factions supported the proposal, the SOC, which would deliver almost all troops for such a security force, did not want to transfer allegiance to the SNC as long as the Khmer Rouge remained a member

---

231 Cable Annan to Akashi, 7 May 1993, "Security for IPSOs," UNA, S-1829-0272-0002; Schoonoord, *Mariniers in Cambodja*, 230; Cable Sadry to Annan, 8 May 1993, "arrangements for polling," UNA, S-0794-0051-0001.

232 Cable Annan to Akashi, 7 May 1993, "Security for IPSOs," UNA, S-1829-0272-0002; Bernard Edinger, "Top French general gloomy on UN's Cambodia operation," *Reuters*, 13 May 1993.

233 Author's interview with Robert Rideau; "Cambodge: opération 'Protection des IPSOS' (ordope « Tonle »)," SHD, GR 2002 Z 163/5.

234 Message UNMO Sector 5 East to Sanderson, 22 May 1993, "Special armed squad," UNA, S-0794-0020-0002; Cable General Sanderson to Annan, 23 May 1993, "French military presence in Cambodia," UNA, S-0794-0020-0002.

235 In February 1993, Rideau encountered Sanderson's resistance when he requested French UNTAC capacity to arrange for the security for the French president. Mitterrand's visit to the temples of Angkor Wat in the turbulent Siem Reap province provided a serious security challenge. Rideau finally ordered a French C-160 Transall to transport French forces from Sihanoukville to Siem Reap to invisibly provide security for the French president. Author's interview with Robert Rideau.

of this body.<sup>236</sup>

After shelving the plan of an “SNC army,” Sanderson proposed to the SOC – as well as to the other two factions – to sign an agreement of cooperation for the joint organisation of security during the elections. UNTAC and the State of Cambodia had a common interest in holding the elections on schedule. Postponing the vote would not help Hun Sen because his government was unable to sustain itself for much longer. The SOC needed international legitimacy through an election victory in order to receive international aid and overcome its financial problems. The morale of many CPAF troops was at an all-time low because the government in Phnom Penh was unable to pay many of their salaries.<sup>237</sup> On 2 April, the three cooperating factions signed a document in which they agreed with UNTAC to “take all necessary measures to ensure the safe conduct of the election in Cambodia.”<sup>238</sup> This unmistakably suggested that the Cambodian factions were allowed to use force against the Khmer Rouge in defence of the electoral process. As the strength of ANKI and KPNLAF was negligible, UNTAC’s agreement with these armies was above all symbolic and aimed at dispelling the impression that UNTAC was forming a military alliance with the CPAF against the Khmer Rouge, although this was practically the case.

Hun Sen had long pushed UNTAC to declare the Khmer Rouge outlaws and allow him to mount an offensive. He was therefore more than willing to accept UNTAC’s request to help protect the UN elections against their now common adversary, and pressured UNTAC to define more clearly the scope of the CPAF’s rights to use force, to avoid of being accused of violating the cease-fire.<sup>239</sup> Although Akashi was initially reluctant to allow the CPAF to undertake offensive actions against the Khmer Rouge, he also realised that it was in UNTAC’s best interests to give Hun Sen the possibility to push the Khmer Rouge as far away from the polling stations and other UNTAC positions as possible. By the end of April, there were indications that a large-scale Khmer Rouge attack was impending on Kompong Speu provincial town, which would bring Pol Pot’s forces within thirty kilometres from Phnom Penh and in the position to launch artillery strikes on the Cambodian capital. Hun Sen announced to Akashi that he intended to launch a pre-emptive strike against the Khmer Rouge to chase them out of the area, but expressed concern that such an operation would be condemned by UNTAC as a cease-fire violation.<sup>240</sup> Fearing for the safety of UNTAC’s military and civilian personnel in Kompong Speu and the idea that the Khmer Rouge would soon be standing “on the doorstep of Phnom Penh,” Akashi allowed Hun Sen to launch the pre-emptive attack, which was euphemistically referred to as an “active self-defence” operation.

---

236 Report on the 31<sup>st</sup> MMWG Secretariat meeting, 23 March 1993, UNA, S-1854-0008-0006; Interoffice memorandum Colonel Huijssoon to Rideau and Akashi, 15 April 1993, “reinforcement of the military component,” UNA, S-1854-0027-0001.

237 Notes of the meeting of the Secretary-General with UNTAC Senior Staff, 8 April 1993, UNA, S-1085-0031-0003.

238 Cooperative arrangement between UNTAC and the Party of the State of Cambodia for the coordination of security measures during the electoral process, 2 April 1993, UNA, S-1854-0018-0004. For UNTAC’s agreements with the other factions, see the same box.

239 Letter Ambassador Ouch Borith (SOC) to the United Nations Secretary-General, 7 April 1993, ADN, 10POI/1 1312; Letter MajGen Prak Mardi (Deputy President of the Coordination Committee) to Sanderson, 12 April 1993, “Request for consideration and taking appropriate measures against the violations of the cease-fire by the DK Party in the areas controlled by the State of Cambodia, violations which seriously threaten the peace process, the life of the Cambodian people and in particular the forthcoming elections,” UNA, S-0794-0050-0003.

240 Cable Akashi to Annan, 3 May 1993, “Military/political assessment of DK capacity and intentions,” UNA, S-0794-0051-0001; Cable Akashi to Annan, 24 April 1993, “Impending attack on Kompong Speu Provincial Town,” UNA, S-0794-0050-0003.

Akashi decided that the UNMOs monitoring the area should be removed for a while as to avoid the impression that UNTAC legitimised the CPAF's actions against the Khmer Rouge.<sup>241</sup> Akashi thus effectively requested Hun Sen to use offensive force to quell the Khmer Rouge threat, as Hun Sen would later assert.<sup>242</sup>

In the weeks before the elections, Sanderson met regularly with CPAF generals Ke Kim Yan, Meas Sophea and Tea Banh to whom he emphasised how dependent UNTAC was on the CPAF to protect the elections against Khmer Rouge attacks. Sanderson made it clear that he expected them to conduct operations to keep the Khmer Rouge away from the polling stations and that the notion of "active self-defence" would be interpreted fairly liberally. "It is [ . . . ] obvious to us," Sanderson said to general Meas Sophea, "that if any group is building up to attack your positions you have the right to attack them before they attack you."<sup>243</sup> Sanderson was particularly concerned about UNTAC's ability to conduct an election in parts of the provinces of Siem Reap, southern Kompong Thom and eastern Kompong Cham. If the CPAF would not be able to hold the line against the Khmer Rouge in these important provinces, the polling process there would have to be aborted, which would mean that these populous areas would be insufficiently represented in the national elections, calling into question the legitimacy of its results.<sup>244</sup> By allowing the CPAF to launch pre-emptive attacks against Khmer Rouge forces, UNTAC outsourced the use of force in defence of its mission to the Khmer Rouge's main opponent. It was only in his latest and most unnoticed analysis of UNTAC that Michael Doyle has appropriately characterised this strategy as "indirect peace enforcement."<sup>245</sup> Whereas UNTAC took a purely defensive posture against the Khmer Rouge insurgency, it Cambodianised the necessary offensive use of force.

Although UNTAC's strategy was based on containing the Khmer Rouge as much as possible, this was virtually impossible because the areas under their control did not consist of hermetically closed zones but constituted what Prince Sihanouk referred to as a *peau de léopard*: small enclaves, such as hills and villages, forming little dots on a map like on leopard skin. Moreover, many places in the countryside that were controlled by the CPAF during the day were under Khmer Rouge influence at night.<sup>246</sup> This geographical dispersal of the Khmer Rouge created a security challenge, and in order to overcome it, UNTAC more or less copied the same model by creating its own UNTAC leopard dots on the map. The plan for the security of the elections, which was drawn up by Australian Lieutenant Colonel Damien Healy, foresaw a clear subdivision of tasks. UNTAC's military and civilian police were responsible for the protection of the immediate vicinity of the polling stations, with a perimeter of 200 metres, keeping the polling sites out of the effective fire

---

241 Cable Akashi to Annan, 26 April 1993, "Impending attack on Kompong Speu Provincial Town," UNA, S-0794-0050-0003.

242 This point was made by Hun Sen at a conference celebrating the tenth anniversary of the Paris Agreements. See: Widyo, *Dancing in Shadows*, 107.

243 Meeting Sanderson with General Meas Sophea of CPAF, UNTAC HQ, Monday 3 May 1993, UNA, S-0794-0021-0001.

244 Meeting Sanderson with General Ke Kim Yan, Commander-in-chief CPAF, Force Commander's Office, UNTAC HQ, Phnom Penh, Tuesday 20 April 1993, UNA, S-0794-0021-0001.

245 In his main publications about UNTAC published in the 1990s, Doyle omitted to make this point. It was only at the occasion of the The John W. Holmes Lecture in 2007 that Doyle shared this insight for the first time. Michael W. Doyle, "The John W. Holmes Lecture: Building Peace," *Global Governance*, 13 (2007): 12.

246 Cable Akashi to Goulding, 29 June 1992, "Meeting with Mr. Hun Sen," UNA, S-0794-0047-0002; Observations by Mr. Goulding after his visit to Cambodia, 20–25 June 1992, UNA, S-0795-0043-0005.



range of small arms and RPGs. The CPAF formed the outer circle of defence and was tasked to avert Khmer Rouge attacks and pin them down away from the voting areas.<sup>247</sup> Thus in the absence of a neutral political environment in Cambodia on the whole, UNTAC turned the polling stations into safe areas within which this neutral environment was created.<sup>248</sup> At exactly the same moment that the UN Security Council officially introduced the term “safe area” in Bosnia, by declaring Srebrenica, Sarajevo, Žepa, Gorazde, Tuzla and Bihać as humanitarian enclaves that were under the protection of UNPROFOR, a somewhat similar construction was applied in Cambodia. The important difference with UNPROFOR was that UNTAC, as Sanderson had repeatedly argued, was not explicitly mandated to protect Cambodian civilians. Officially, the blue helmets around the polling stations were only allowed to protect UN personnel and property.

While the Khmer Rouge-controlled territory was labelled as a no-go area for UNTAC, the rest of Cambodia was divided into high-, medium- and low-risk zones, with each a different level of accordingly applied security measures. The status of every district in the country was reviewed on a daily basis by the sector commanders and electoral officials. In high-risk zones, armed blue helmets were stationed in and around polling stations, with trenches prepared in case of ground attacks or artillery strikes. The electoral staff was issued with the US-delivered helmets and flak-jackets. Quick Reaction Forces and medical support units were standing by to rush to the 1,400 fixed and 200 mobile polling stations.<sup>249</sup> Sanderson was satisfied to see UNTAC sector commanders cooperating closely with the CPAF in making their preparations.<sup>250</sup>

As UNTAC relied heavily on the strength of the cooperating factions for the defence of the elections, it was naturally compelled to return the weapons that it had confiscated from them earlier. The day after the 4 May ambush at Phum Ampil, Prince Ranariddh officially requested the release of some weapons for ANKI forces in Banteay Meanchey province.<sup>251</sup> The other two factions soon followed this example.<sup>252</sup> Sanderson especially felt pressured to release the weapons belonging to ANKI and KPNLAF, as these armies were nearly fully disarmed and the most vulnerable for attacks by the Khmer Rouge. The two smaller factions had enthusiastically handed in their weapons of which many were of excellent quality, contrary to those from the CPAF which Sanderson described as “fundamentally rubbish” and therefore considered that it would be of very limited military value to return them.<sup>253</sup> At the same time, the force commander felt that there was a danger that the CPAF might not fully honour its agreement with UNTAC to provide for security during the elections if its weapons were not given back to them. The return of weapons was thus considered as an important instrument to keep the factions engaged in their commitment

---

247 Cooperative arrangement between UNTAC and the Party of the State of Cambodia for the coordination of security measures during the electoral process, 2 April 1993, UNA, S-1854-0018-0004; Brocades Zaalberg, *Soldiers and Civil Power*, 136.

248 Chanserey Mum, the French-Cambodian deputy director of UNTAC's civil administration component described the UNTAC polling stations in May 1993 as “safe enclaves.” See: Lizée, *Peace Power and Resistance in Cambodia*, 115.

249 Report of the Secretary-General on the Implementation of Security Council Resolution 810 (1993), 15 May 1993, UNA, S-1829-0272-0002.

250 Meeting Sanderson with General Meas Sophea of CPAF, UNTAC HQ Phnom Penh, 18 May 1993, UNA, S-0794-0021-0001.

251 Letter Norodom Ranariddh to Sanderson, 5 May 1993, “046/FP/Cab/PP93,” UNA, S-1829-0270-0007.

252 Letter General Sak Sutsakhan to Akashi, 13 May 1993, “The Return of Cantoned Weapons to the KPNLAF,” UNA, S-1829-270-0007; Meeting Akashi with the Expanded Permanent Five, 17 May 1993, UNA, S-1829-0270-0007.

253 Meeting Akashi with Phnom Penh Ambassadors on Siem Reap (& other) incidents, UNTAC HQ, Wednesday 5 May 1993, UNA, S-0794-0021-0001.

to project the elections.<sup>254</sup> Sanderson admitted to Annan that it was “a major political step,” but argued that it was justified by the threat the Khmer Rouge posed to the elections.<sup>255</sup>

Considering the fact that returning weapons to combatants was in complete contradiction to the principles of peace and UN peacekeeping, New York reacted very reluctantly to the idea. Annan feared that it could provoke the Khmer Rouge, who were already accusing UNTAC of siding with Hun Sen. The disconnect between New York and Phnom Penh was once again clearly illustrated when Annan added that he did not believe that the security situation in Cambodia had deteriorated to the level that justified the return of weapons to the factions.<sup>256</sup> Akashi was astonished about the misconception in New York about the seriousness of the situation in Cambodia and emphasised that he saw “no other alternative than agreeing to the request for the return of cantoned weapons by the three factions who cooperate.” He felt that the Khmer Rouge had no grounds to criticise UNTAC as they had themselves flatly refused to hand in any of their weapons. He also felt the “moral obligation” to the three cooperating armies not to endanger their ability to withstand attacks by the Khmer Rouge.<sup>257</sup> Eventually, the UN Secretary-General and the P5 acknowledged that the safety of the electoral process depended to a large measure on the Cambodian armed forces, and accordingly, allowed the three cooperating factions to retrieve their weapons they had put under UNTAC guard.<sup>258</sup>

The Khmer Rouge clearly understood that UNTAC was cooperating with the CPAF in defence of the elections and this seemed to have a deterrent effect on at least some of their units. A few days before the polling, a Khmer Rouge commander presented himself to a company of French peacekeepers in Takeo province with a revealing proposal. He promised not to attack during the elections if UNTAC could guarantee that the CPAF would not move into the Khmer Rouge-controlled zones.<sup>259</sup> In other areas, however, Khmer Rouge commanders were less inclined to make deals. In the night of 20 May, a large Khmer Rouge force targeted the UNMO building in the small town of Stoung in Kompong Thom province. The military observers were evacuated by an Indonesian APC under heavy fire. Fierce fighting followed between the CPAF and the Khmer Rouge in the surrounding jungle.<sup>260</sup> Later that day, Sanderson emphasised to the cooperating factions in the Supreme National Council that in the regions adjacent to Khmer Rouge areas it was “necessary for some offensive actions to take place for self-defence,” which included actions to restore control of villages that would otherwise be deprived of the opportunity to vote.<sup>261</sup>

254 Cable Sanderson to Annan, 13 May 1993, “Return of cantoned weapons,” and “Meeting with the Expanded Permanent Five,” 17 May 1993, UNA, S-1829-270-0007; Meeting on “Electoral Security” on 7 May 1993. See: Internal message Yahmed to Porcell, 18 May 1993, “Report on the 6<sup>th</sup> Civil Administration Seminar,” ADN, 521PO/2/33.

255 Cable Sanderson to Annan, 5 May 1993, “Cambodian factions’ request for return of cantoned weapons,” UNA, S-0794-0021-0001.

256 Cable Annan to Akashi and Sanderson, 5 May 1993, “Cambodian factions’ request for return of cantoned weapons,” UNA, S-1829-0272-0002.

257 Cable Akashi to Annan, 14 May 1993, “Return of cantoned weapons,” UNA, S-0794-0051-0002.

258 Report of the Secretary-General on the Implementation of Security Council Resolution 810 (1993), 15 May 1993, UNA, S-1829-0272-0002; Cable Akashi to Annan, 17 May 1993, “Today’s meeting with the Expanded Permanent Five,” 17 May 1993, UNA, S-1829-0270-0007. Ultimately, however, Prince Ranariddh decided not to insist on the request of the return of the weapons to his army so not to provoke the Khmer Rouge. See: entretien M. Akashi avec S.A.R. le prince Norodom Ranariddh, 11 May 1993, UNA, S-0794-0051-0001.

259 Journal des marches et opérations du bataillon français au Cambodge du 29 Novembre 1992 au 17 Juin 1993 dépendant de l’Autorité Provisoire des Nations Unies Au Cambodge – Secteur 6, SHD, GR 2000 Z 114 5.

260 Weekly military information summary 20 – 93 Period 15 May–21 May 93, UNA, S-1829-0314-0005.

261 Daily Press Briefing, 21 May 1993, UNA, S-0794-0020-0002.

Sanderson had been very careful in his phrasing, but journalists quickly understood that the force commander actually gave the CPAF a “go-ahead” to conduct pre-emptive strikes against the Khmer Rouge.<sup>262</sup> This is confirmed by the fact that, on the same day, Akashi reiterated to Hun Sen that offensive actions by his army, aimed at re-taking areas that had been lost to the Khmer Rouge previously, would be seen by UNTAC as falling under the right to self-defence.<sup>263</sup>

### **The successful defence of the elections**

In the morning of 23 May, on the first election day, everyone held their collective breath, and some mistook the rumbling of a heavy thunderstorm for Khmer Rouge artillery. But the Khmer Rouge did not mount a large-scale attack and the Cambodians streamed to the polling stations in massive numbers. On the first day alone, a staggering 2.2 million Cambodians, nearly half of the registered voters, came out to cast their vote. Dressed in their nicest clothes and in good spirits, the Cambodians waited patiently for hours in front of the polling stations in a festive atmosphere. Only the fact that the polling stations looked like small fortresses, with all the sandbags and barbed wire, and were guarded by vigilant blue helmets, reminded everyone of the precarious security situation.<sup>264</sup>

However, the dominant idea that the Khmer Rouge remained completely passive during the elections is incorrect. Although the overall situation remained indeed calm, some scattered attempts of disruption did occur, but only to be repulsed effectively by UNTAC and especially by the CPAF. In the early morning of 23 May, Khmer Rouge soldiers attacked a village in Kampot province where French peacekeepers were preparing a polling station for the first election day. The foreign legionnaires engaged the Khmer Rouge forces and succeeded in forcing them to withdraw, but it was nonetheless decided to close several polling stations in the district as a precautionary measure.<sup>265</sup> In Siem Reap, some voting booths were also closed due to Khmer Rouge artillery fire. The following four election days also went well. In some places, even some unarmed Khmer Rouge soldiers showed up at some polling stations.<sup>266</sup> Incidents continued to occur, but on all occasions, UNTAC and the CPAF proved very effective in quickly chasing the Khmer Rouge attackers away. On the second election day, Khmer Rouge soldiers managed to fire several RPGs at a polling site in Kampong Cham province, but they were immediately dislodged by CPAF forces. Also on the 24<sup>th</sup>, in Botum Sakor, a village near Sihanoukville, a small Khmer Rouge unit approached a polling station, but CPAF troops quickly arrived and drove them off without firing a shot.<sup>267</sup>

---

262 Mark Dodd, “U.N. authorises offensives to guard Cambodia polls,” *Reuters*, 20 May 1993; Tan Lian Choo, “UN gives go-ahead for use of force,” *The Strait Times*, 21 May 1993; Nicholas Cumming-Bruce, “UN approves force against Khmer Rouge as poll nears,” *The Guardian*, 21 May 1993; Daily Press Briefing, 21 May 1993, UNA, S-0794-0020-0002.

263 Meeting Akashi with Hun Sen, 20 May 1993, UNA, S-1829-0270-0007. Akashi also confirmed this agreement with Hun Sen to the Japanese press. See: “UNTAC to let Phnom Penh regain territory, daily says,” *Asian Political News Kyodo News International*, 24 May 1993.

264 Widyono, *Dancing in Shadows*, 120–21; Cable Colonel Huijssoon to The Hague, 24 May 1993, “Info Cambodja,” NIMH-099, folder 68.

265 Journal de Marche et Opérations du Bataillon Français au Cambodge du 29 Novembre 1992 au 17 Juin 1993 APRONUC – Secteur 6, SHD, GR 2000 Z 114 5.

266 Brocades Zaalberg, *Soldiers and Civil Power*, 148.

267 Situation at polling stations in Cambodia as at 241000 HRS May 93 Cambodia time, UNA, S-1829-0314-0005; Cable Huijssoon to The Hague, 24 May 1993, “Info Cambodja,” NIMH-099, folder 68.

On 27 May, a mobile polling station was attacked by Khmer Rouge elements in the notorious district of Soth Nikhum, east of Siem Reap city. Three Cambodian voters were injured and a major from the Bangladeshi battalion was shot in the leg, but again, the attackers were driven off by intervening CPAF forces.<sup>268</sup> Scholars Michael Doyle and Jarat Chopra, who were both present during the election days in Kompong Thom province, observed that the UNTAC-CPAF security cooperation was working very effectively.<sup>269</sup> Whereas UNTAC defended the elections, the CPAF effectively protected it. Officer-scholar Patrice Sartre has emphasised the difference between using force in self-defence and for protection, arguing that self-defence can, by definition, only be defensive, whereas protection can involve locally and momentarily offensive action.<sup>270</sup>

The total voter turnout of 89.6 per cent of the registered Cambodian voters was a number most Western democracies could only dream of. It seemed like a miracle and the relief was enormous. Akashi later described it as the best day of his life.<sup>271</sup> It certainly delivered the UN a much-needed victory. The Khmer Rouge had clearly failed in its objective to scare off the Cambodian voters and chase UNTAC out of the country. Akashi was pleased to certify on 29 May that the polling had been free and fair. Even Prince Sihanouk, who had been overtly sceptical about the “UNTACist” elections, also called it a “tremendous and historic success.”<sup>272</sup> Besides a testimony of the courage of the Cambodian people, the high voter turnout was also a demonstration that UNTAC had succeeded in convincing the overwhelming majority of the Cambodian population that their ballot would remain secret at every polling station. Scholars have largely acknowledged that UNTAC’s civic education activities played a pivotal role in building this confidence in the democratic process.<sup>273</sup> It has also been pointed out that the civilian components would not have been able to do their work without the support of the military component that ensured a safe electoral environment.<sup>274</sup> Indeed, the military component’s “greater show of military strength” and display of “firmness and determination” was also an important element in effectively deterring the Khmer Rouge and giving the Cambodians the confidence to go out and vote.<sup>275</sup> UNTAC demonstrated a will to succeed and used all necessary means to achieve this outcome. Sanderson later recalled that UNTAC “went at [its] task with a will.”<sup>276</sup>

In the end, the elections were saved basically because the Khmer Rouge did not launch an all-out attack on the polling stations. The question they did not do this has been a topic of much speculation. Most of the explanations that have been put forward by scholars and contemporaries suggest that it was a last-minute decision made by the Khmer Rouge leadership. It has been argued

---

268 Daily press briefing 27 May 1993, UNA, S-1854-0075-0002; Widyono, *Dancing in shadows*, 121.

269 Doyle, “The John W. Holmes Lecture,” 12; Michael W. Doyle and Ayaka Suzuki, “Transitional Authority in Cambodia,” in *The United Nations and Civil Wars*, ed. Thomas G. Weis (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1995), 147.

270 Patrice Sartre, “La robustesse du maintien de la paix des Nations Unies: Ni contraindre ni céder mais protéger pour convaincre,” in *La paix par la force: Pour une approche réaliste du maintien de la paix « robuste »*, eds. Jocelyn Coulon and Alexandre Novosseloff (Outremont: Athéna éditions, 2011), 72.

271 Akashi, “The Challenge of Peacekeeping in Cambodia,” 204.

272 Daily press briefing 29 May 1993 12:00, UNA, S-1829-0270-0006.

273 Jennar, “Cambodge: l’entreprise inachevée,” 59; Ratner, *The New UN Peacekeeping*, 185; Findlay, *Cambodia*, 86, 152; Doyle, “UNTAC: Sources of Success and Failure,” 92; Peou, *Conflict Neutralization*, 212.

274 Peou, *Conflict Neutralization*, 230, 212; Also see: Schear, “Riding the Tiger,” 167. Brocades Zaalberg, *Soldiers and Civil Power*, 419. Brocades Zaalberg has demonstrated that the close civil-military coordination and the leading role of the military in the electoral process was essential in organising successful elections.

275 Peou, *Conflict Neutralization*, 230; Jennar, “International Triumph in Cambodia,” 148.

276 Interview by Hugh Smith with John Sanderson.

that diplomatic pressure from several countries might have convinced the Khmer Rouge that it would be better to remain passive. Akashi personally believed that the Thai military, which stood under Japanese and American pressure, helped to persuade the Khmer Rouge to keep quiet.<sup>277</sup> The Chilean historian Julio Jeldres, who was Sihanouk's personal secretary from 1981 to 1991, has argued that just before the elections, Chinese officials warned Khieu Samphan that Beijing would withdraw all its support if they would mount attacks against the elections.<sup>278</sup> It is hard to imagine, however, that the Khmer Rouge bowed for Beijing's pressure as they had not demonstrated any inclination in the preceding year to listen to their former patron. Moreover, if this had been the case, the Chinese could easily have claimed credit for saving the peace process, which would have helped to enhance their damaged international standing after the Tiananmen Square massacre in June 1989. But they did not make any such assertions. Journalist William Shawcross has pointed at Sihanouk's arrival in Cambodia on the day before the start of the election, which might have had a decisive effect, given the great respect Sihanouk enjoyed among many of the Khmer Rouge. Khieu Samphan had tried to persuade the prince to sit out the election in Beijing, but Boutros-Ghali's and Mitterrand's letters urging him to return to Phnom Penh seemed to have had a greater effect on him. The prince ultimately decided to return to Cambodia and support the elections, which was a significant blow for the Khmer Rouge.<sup>279</sup> To this must be added that when Khieu Samphan visited Sihanouk at his residence in Pyongyang, where he normally lived two months a year during his time in exile,<sup>280</sup> the prince had urged him not to commit any violent actions.<sup>281</sup> It is also possible that the Khmer Rouge preferred to keep their hands clean in order to have a better chance to join a national reconciliation arrangement after the elections.<sup>282</sup>

The question whether there have been behind-the-scenes diplomatic pressures or not does not alter the fact that some individual Khmer Rouge units did attempt some small-scale attacks on polling stations. Moreover, interviews with Khmer Rouge "self-demobilisers," or defectors, conducted by the American Cambodia-scholar Steven Heder and other Khmer-speaking colleagues of UNTAC's analysis and assessment unit,<sup>283</sup> suggest that general orders were actually given to launch attacks on polling stations, and that these instructions remained in force through the elections. The testimonies also suggest that the main purpose of the attacks was to scare away voters, but that the killing of Cambodian civilians was to be avoided. Shelling and attacking the area around the polling stations would suffice. But the Khmer Rouge defectors told Heder that

277 Report on the visit of Mr. Yasushi Akashi Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Cambodia to Washington, DC, 20–21 July 1993, UNA, S-1085-0031-0001.

278 Julio A. Jeldres, "Cambodia's relations with China a steadfast friendship," in *Cambodia: progress and challenges since 1991*, eds. Pou Sothirak, Geoff Wade and Mark Hong (Singapore; Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2012), 84.

279 Shawcross, *Deliver Us from Evil*, 77.

280 The sixty-room palace at the shore of Lake Changsuwon was specially built for the Prince in 1974 as a gift from North Korean president Kim Il-Sung, with whom Sihanouk maintained a close relationship, based on a personal friendship and not on ideological or strategic interests. Sihanouk was always accompanied by another gift from Kim: a squad of North Korean bodyguards. See: Sebastian Strangio, "North Korea's New Friend?," *The Diplomat*, 14 August 1991.

281 Cable Akashi to Iqbal Riza, 12 May 1993, "Meeting between Prince Sihanouk and Mr. Akashi on 5 May 1993 in Beijing," UNA, S-0794-0051-0001; Message de Norodom Sihanouk à ses bien-aimés compatriotes, 10 May 1993, UNA, S-0794-0051-0001.

282 This was the prediction made by the Permanent Representative of Indonesia during a working luncheon with the core group on 2 April 1993 in New York hosted by Australian foreign minister Gareth Evans. See: Cable Akashi to Annan, 5 April 1993, "Australian working luncheon on Cambodia," UNA, S-0794-0045-0002.

283 Which was essentially a think tank of Khmer-speaking Cambodia experts within UNTAC's Information and Education Division.



they were unable to carry out these instructions because the deployment of CPAF and UNTAC forces made it too difficult for them to approach polling stations close enough. Heder concludes that the inability or unwillingness of individual Khmer Rouge detachments was the main reason for the fact that very few polling stations were eventually attacked.<sup>284</sup> Raoul Jennar has also pointed to the statements by Khmer Rouge defectors explaining that the security measures put in place by UNTAC and the CPAF had made them decide to abandon their plans to sabotage the elections.<sup>285</sup> This analysis concurs with the experience of officers of the Dutch battalion who also believed that the Khmer Rouge indeed intended to attack polling stations, but did not get the chance because they could not find any “soft targets” in the Dutch sector, as all the voting-safe-areas were hard targets. The Dutch marines also felt that the use of the Cambodian factions’ armies had contributed greatly to the overall security.<sup>286</sup> Karl Ferris, the most senior American officer in Cambodia and later director of the Peacekeeping Institute at the US Army War College in Carlisle, has pointed out that the failure of the Khmer Rouge to disrupt the elections must in large part be credited to UNTAC’s security plan.<sup>287</sup>

Sanderson also assessed that the Khmer Rouge’s failure to mount large-scale attacks reflected a fear for heavy losses in a serious effort to disrupt the polls, which they could not afford.<sup>288</sup> In interviews with journalists and researchers, the force commander pointed at the fact that in the weeks preceding the elections, the CPAF had successfully pushed back the Khmer Rouge from the main population areas and polling stations.<sup>289</sup> In the days after the elections, Sanderson wrote to the CPAF commander-in-chief, General Ke Kim Yan, that the collaboration with the CPAF “enabled the UNTAC-sponsored election to be conducted successfully.”<sup>290</sup> And during a meeting with Ke Kim Yan, the force commander personally thanked him: “I am very grateful for the co-cooperation we received from CPAF. I think this was a very important aspect of the whole campaign. CPAF and UNTAC were able to secure the election process.”<sup>291</sup> To the core group ambassadors in Phnom Penh, Sanderson declared that the success of the elections “was partially due to the role of the CPAF,” which provided vital security in areas where they thought the Khmer Rouge would be likely to launch assaults.<sup>292</sup>

Karl Ferris has argued that the joint effort to protect the elections did not jeopardise UNTAC’s impartiality. This assertion might be defensible if one presents the UNTAC-CPAF security alliance, as Ferris does, as UNTAC requesting the three cooperating factions to “assume

---

284 Heder, “The Resumption of Armed Struggle,” 99–103.

285 Jennar, “Cambodge: l’entreprise inachevée,” 59–60. Jennar, *Croniques Cambodgiennes*, 441–42.

286 Brocades Zaalberg, *Soldiers and Civil Power*, 150.

287 Karl Ferris, “UN Peacekeeping in Cambodia: On Balance, A Success,” *Parameters*, 24, no. 1 (Spring 1994): 45.

288 Horner and Connor, *The Good International Citizen*, 208; “Teaching the Khmer Rouge a lesson,” *Business Times Singapore*, 10 July 1993.

289 Michael W. Doyle, “Authority and elections in Cambodia,” in *Keeping the peace: Multidimensional UN operations in Cambodia and El Salvador*, eds. Michael W. Doyle, Ian Johnstone and Robert C. Orr (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 155; Shawcross, *Deliver Us from Evil*, 86.

290 Letter Sanderson to General Ke Kim Yan, Vice Minister of the State of Cambodia, 11 June 1993, UNA, S-0794-0021-0001.

291 Meeting Sanderson with General Ke Kim Yan, Commander-in-chief CPAF, Friday 4 June 1993, UNA, S-0794-0021-0001.

292 Meeting with the EP-5, 17 June, Cambodiana hotel, 1500–1910. See: Cable Akashi to Annan, 21 June 1993, “Special Core Group Meeting Phnom Penh 17/18 June,” UNA, S-0794-0051-0003.



*Soldiers of the Cambodian People's Armed Forces (CPAF), the army of Hun Sen's State of Cambodia.*  
Photo credit: © Michel Riehl /ECPAD/Défense.

responsibility for security in the countryside of the areas under their control.”<sup>293</sup> But this interpretation becomes less convincing when held against the fact that the focal point of the cooperation was the CPAF, which was encouraged by UNTAC to launch pre-emptive strikes against an identified opponent under the euphemistic label of “active self-defence.” Other scholars have depicted the cooperation between UNTAC and the CPAF as a measure to prevent the three cooperating parties from becoming vulnerable, to commit the undisciplined CPAF to the electoral process, to curb banditry, and as a catalyst for the unification of the Cambodian armed forces after the elections.<sup>294</sup> These analyses seem to have been influenced by Sanderson’s own post-UNTAC accounts in which he has not given the CPAF the same credit for the success as he did in the immediate aftermath of the elections. Instead he asserted that it was Hun Sen’s army, rather than Pol Pot’s, that posed the greatest threat to the elections.<sup>295</sup> It is true that the power of the CPAF, which had only partially disarmed, was hanging as a sword of Damocles over the post-election period. But the fact of the matter is that UNTAC needed the CPAF to effectively prevent the Khmer Rouge from successfully disrupting the electoral process in the first place. Rather than posing a threat to the elections, Hun Sen’s army became UNTAC’s auxiliary peace enforcer. Considerations for the post-election period certainly seemed to have played a role, but Sanderson’s argument that this was the main reason for the security agreement conceals UNTAC’s strong dependence on the CPAF to achieve its main objective. Publicly, Sanderson has

293 Ferris, “UN Peacekeeping in Cambodia,” 45.

294 Schear, “Riding the Tiger,” 170; Brocades Zaalberg, *Soldiers and Civil Power*, 137; Peou, *Conflict Neutralization*, 229.

295 Sanderson, “UNTAC: Successes and Failures,” 27; Sanderson, “UNTAC: The Military Component View,” 135.

made the argument, which has often been endorsed by scholars, that UNTAC's "alliance with the Cambodian people" was the essential element for the elections' success.<sup>296</sup> There is no doubt that UNTAC's effort to persuade the Cambodians to go out and vote was absolutely vital, but this somewhat romanticised narrative masks the importance of the alliance the force commander forged with the army of the Phnom Penh government against, what had become, a common adversary. In the end, this alliance was more instrumental in saving the success of the elections.

### **Stabilising "success"**

The Paris Peace Agreements stipulated that UNTAC would withdraw once the constituent assembly had adopted a new constitution and a new government was formed. This was to be done within ninety days. In this turbulent last phase of the operation, UNTAC focussed on its withdrawal and tried to consolidate its "success." The operation turned from an election implementation force into a stabilisation force that helped the provisional government to build the necessary capacity to face an insurgency by the Khmer Rouge.

The "success" of the elections created a pleasant illusion of peace and democracy, but UNTAC was quickly confronted with the harsh, complex and far from peaceful reality. While the Khmer Rouge had not caused any large-scale disruptions during the elections, their behaviour continued to be hostile, although it varied per region. Whereas in north-western Banteay Meanchey province NADK elements approached the Dutch battalion with a proposal to conduct joint patrols, in other places they continued to intimidate and attack UNTAC. On 30 May, a unit of the French Foreign Legion in Kampot province got into a firefight with sixty Khmer Rouge soldiers. The next day, an UNTAC convoy with Uruguayan and Polish peacekeepers was ambushed by the Khmer Rouge in Kompong Cham province. One Uruguayan soldier was killed and a Pole was seriously injured.<sup>297</sup> On 7 June, a platoon of peacekeepers from Pakistan located in Preah Vihear was attacked by a Khmer Rouge unit of more than a hundred soldiers. After shelling the Pakistani position with mortars, they advanced closely while firing and shouting "UNTAC out." It was clear that the Khmer Rouge's objective was to chase UNTAC out of the country. The Pakistani peacekeepers defended themselves effectively and after two hours of exchanging fire, they forced the withdrawal of the Khmer Rouge, who left two dead behind. Two Pakistani soldiers were injured in the fighting.<sup>298</sup> These were serious incidents, the UN operation in Cambodia was completely overshadowed in the international media by the escalating situation in Somalia, where twenty-four Pakistani peacekeepers were killed in an ambush by forces loyal to General Aidid, after which the Security Council responded by effectively declaring war on the Somali warlord. Compared to Somalia, the relatively quiet elections in Cambodia had provided uplifting news that seemed to announce the successful completion of the operation.

---

296 Sanderson, "The UNTAC Military Component," 126. This argument has been cited in: Findlay, *Cambodia*, 112; Brocades Zaalberg, *Soldiers and Civil Power*, 134; Doyle, *UNTAC's Civil Mandate*, 86; Jeni Whalan, *How Peace Operations Work*, 120.

297 Daily press briefing 31 May, 7.00 p.m., UNA, S-0794-0036-0004; Peter Eng, "After Peaceful Election, Khmer Rouge Step Up Attacks," *The Associated Press*, 31 May 1993.

298 Interoffice memorandum, Lt Col Li Bolin to Sanderson, 12 June 1993, Investigation report on the attack against Pakistan platoon in Phnum Tbeng (VA9001) sector 03 on 7 June 93, UNA, S-0794-0051-0003; Cable Akashi to Annan, 16 June 1993, "Post-election contingency planning," UNA, S-0794-0051-0003.

The Cambodians might have voted with enthusiasm in the polling, the ideal of peace through democratisation quickly encountered the reality of the Cambodian political culture which had traditionally been characterised by an absolutist winner-takes-all mentality.<sup>299</sup> As most Cambodia scholars had predicted, it became clear that the immediate aftermath of the elections was just as significant for the composition of the new government as the voting results of the UNTAC-organised elections.<sup>300</sup> When preliminary returns of the count indicated that FUNCINPEC was taking the lead, Hun Sen immediately raised complaints that security seals on ballot boxes were broken and counting errors had been committed.<sup>301</sup> To many, it did not come as a surprise that Hun Sen refused to give up power. Prince Sihanouk understood this and made his move on 3 June – days before the official count of the votes was published – by announcing an agreement between FUNCINPEC and the CPP to form a “Provisional National Government” with himself as head of state and supreme commander of the armed forces and police. Hun Sen and Prince Ranariddh would be vice-presidents and share power fifty-fifty. Neither Ranariddh nor Akashi had been consulted by Sihanouk, and both were careful to recognise the new government because the P5 were not in agreement about Sihanouk’s proposal. Although France tried to convince the other P5 members to support this power-sharing deal for the sake of stability, the United States strongly opposed the initiative out of concern that it would become a permanent solution in which Ranariddh would be denied power and control, which did not reflect the outcome of the elections.<sup>302</sup> Sihanouk, sensitive as always to US interventions, was particularly irritated by the American objection and withdrew his initiative the next day.<sup>303</sup>

The definitive election results, published on 10 June, revealed that Ranariddh’s FUNCINPEC had won with more than 45 per cent of the vote. Hun Sen’s CPP followed second with 38 per cent of the casted votes. Third came the Buddhist Liberal Democratic Party (BLDP), the political party of the right-wing KPNLF, receiving a minor 3.8 per cent. With FUNCINPEC as the clear winner of the elections, the Khmer Rouge did not object to the results, revealing that it hoped to strike a deal with Ranariddh with whom they maintained close contacts. Whereas Ranariddh had always preached reconciliation with the Khmer Rouge, Hun Sen had made it clear that he would continue his struggle against the guerrilla insurgents.<sup>304</sup> Tensions were rising as the SOC now accused the UN and foreign countries of rigging the election results. Several demonstrations were held by hardliners of the CPP, demanding UNTAC to leave. In one confusing incident, occurring in the dark of night, Malaysian peacekeepers were fired upon by CPAF forces.<sup>305</sup>

In a dramatic acceleration of events, Prince Norodom Chakrapong, one of Sihanouk’s sons

---

299 Roberts, *Political Transition in Cambodia*, 32.

300 Doyle, *UNTAC’s Civil Mandate*, 72.

301 Akashi, “The Challenge of Peacekeeping in Cambodia,” 207.

302 Jennar, *Chroniques Cambodgiennes*, 469; Interview with Ambassador Charles T. Twining by Charles S. Kennedy, 26 May 2004, The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, Library of Congress, Manuscript/Mixed Material. <https://www.loc.gov/item/mfdipbib001474/>; Déclaration du porte-parole du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, Paris, le 3 juin 1993 & déclaration du porte-parole du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, Paris, le 1<sup>er</sup> juin 1993, UNA, S-0704-0008-0004; Cable Levitte to Phnom Penh, 10 June 1993, “Cambodge,” ADN, 521PO/2/27.

303 Jennar, *Chroniques Cambodgiennes*, 462–65; Nate Thayer, “Bloodied Foreigners,” *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 17 June 1993, 10–11.

304 Vickery, *Cambodia: A Political Survey*, 39.

305 Cable Akashi to Annan, 11 June 1993, “Anti-UNTAC activity inspired by SOC,” UNA, S-0794-0051-0003; Fax Lt Col Suresh Nair to Sanderson, 12 June 1993, “Investigation report on the attack on Mal Batt location at Phum Tapoung TV 9368, sector 8 on 07 June 93,” UNA, S-0794-0051-0003.

and SOC-deputy prime minister, suddenly staged a “secession” of three populous provinces in the east together with General Sin Song, the minister of National Security. Two days later, five more provinces in eastern Cambodia joined the self-declared “autonomous zone” and Hun Sen alluded to the possibility of a violent revolt.<sup>306</sup> Again, Sihanouk decided to step in by proclaiming a new Provisional National Government of Cambodia and practically renewing his previous proposal of equal power-sharing between Hun Sen and Ranariddh, with himself as head of state. Ranariddh now realised he had no other choice than to compromise with the all-powerful Hun Sen. With the provisional government installed, the secessionist movement suddenly collapsed, and Chakrapong and Sin Song fled to Vietnam.<sup>307</sup> The crisis suddenly ended because Hun Sen had gained what he wanted, and now accepted the election results.<sup>308</sup> This time, US ambassador Twining persuaded Washington to accept the arrangement that created two Prime Ministers, and Akashi did the same vis-à-vis UN headquarters in New York.<sup>309</sup> UNTAC was a bystander of these happenings which Akashi described as “very Cambodian.” The special representative believed that “a modus vivendi” should be found in which the Cambodian armed forces would remain effectively in the hands of Hun Sen while the most visible posts in the new government would go to Ranariddh’s party as the winner of the elections. He felt that it was better for the UN not to get more deeply involved in Cambodia and that, ultimately, the problems of Cambodia were for Cambodians to solve. UNTAC’s priority now was to “ensure the success of a venture into which it has invested so much credit.”<sup>310</sup>

The most immediate threat to the UN’s “success” in Cambodia remained the Khmer Rouge who still occupied a considerable part of the country, with an army of at least 10,000 active troops.<sup>311</sup> It was therefore important that the provisional government had the military capacities to effectively defend itself against the insurgency. Sanderson also recognised this and claimed a pivotal role in the amalgamation of the factions’ forces into a new Cambodian army. Already in late January 1993, he had started negotiations with the cooperating factions’ armies about the creation of a post-election security force in order to stabilise the period after the elections and commit the factions’ armies to the new authorities.<sup>312</sup> The factions – especially the bankrupt SOC – had no recourse to pay their forces, and it was not difficult to imagine what problems could arise when thousands of unpaid soldiers would refuse to report for duty. In March, Sanderson had shared his concerns about the post-election period with Gareth Evans, after which the Australian foreign minister instructed his staff to develop a new policy paper, entitled “Cambodia: Beyond the elections,” which essentially proposed that UN member states should financially and materially support the provisional government of Cambodia. Other core group countries also recognised

---

306 Akashi, “The Challenge of Peacekeeping in Cambodia,” 207.

307 Philip Shenon, “Cambodian Secession Movement Seems to End as Its Leader Flees,” *The New York Times*, 16 June 1993.

308 Communiqué of the Cambodian People’s Party, 20 June 1993, UNA, S-0794-0051-0003.

309 Kenton Clymer, *The United States and Cambodia, 1969–2000: A troubled relationship* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 164; Akashi, “An Assessment of UNTAC,” 157.

310 Cable Akashi to Annan, 16 June 1993, “Post-election contingency planning,” UNA, S-0794-0051-0003; Cable Akashi to Annan, 21 June 1993, “Special Core Group Meeting Phnom Penh 17/18 June,” UNA, S-0794-0051-0003.

311 Cable Akashi to Annan, 21 June 1993, “Special Core Group Meeting Phnom Penh 17/18 June,” UNA, S-0794-0051-0003.

312 Report of 22<sup>nd</sup> Secretariat level MMWG meeting, 28 January 1993, UNA, S-0797-0004-0009.



these problems and were supportive of the idea.<sup>313</sup> The Mixed Military Working Group Secretariat, Sanderson's policy making office within the plans branch, developed the idea into a concrete operational plan in which UNTAC would take care of paying the salaries of the troops, policemen and civil servants who rallied to the provisional government, and the newly elected government when it was in place. Initially, the UN Secretary-General showed little enthusiasm for the idea as he considered it politically difficult to make payments to the armed forces of the Cambodian factions which it was actually supposed to separate and disarm.<sup>314</sup> Such actions went beyond the provisions of the Paris Agreements, but Boutros-Ghali seemed to ignore that circumstances had changed considerably and that UNTAC could hardly be considered an impartial peacekeeping operation anymore.

Almost immediately after the elections, Sanderson took the plan to another level. On 10 June, the force commander convened the generals of the CPAF, ANKI and KPNLAF in the Mixed Military Working Group, during which the amalgamation of their armies into the new Cambodian Armed Forces (CAF) was officialised.<sup>315</sup> Symbolically and politically, this was a huge development because two former factions belonging to the "resistance" now joined forces with their former enemy in Phnom Penh. Practically, however, the CAF was old wine in new bottles and came down to a small reinforcement of the CPAF that remained by far the dominant force with approximately 40,000 active soldiers, while ANKI and the KPNLAF each struggled to deliver an additional 5,000 men.<sup>316</sup> Sanderson took a prominent position in the construction of the new Cambodian army and Prince Sihanouk enthusiastically offered the UNTAC force commander to become the CAF's commander-in-chief. Obviously, this proposition could not be accepted, neither by Sanderson nor by the UN, as it would put UNTAC's force commander in the awkward position to lead three Cambodian parties in counterinsurgency actions against the Khmer Rouge, something he had always wanted to avoid.<sup>317</sup> Sihanouk's proposition nonetheless illustrated how UNTAC's role had changed, in the prince's perception.

These developments made alarm bells go off in Paris where it was felt that Sanderson was going far beyond his responsibilities.<sup>318</sup> The force commander's initiative was perceived by Paris as yet another example of Canberra's "activism" in Cambodia, bypassing the leadership of the UN Security Council, and as a ploy to lay the groundwork for Australian influence in the Cambodian military.<sup>319</sup> The French consequently decided not to wait any longer and to accelerate their own plans for setting up a bilateral Franco-Cambodian defence cooperation. French minister of Defence, François Léotard, visited Cambodia on 6 July and signed an agreement with Hun Sen and Ranariddh to provide military advice, support and training to the armed forces of the new

---

313 Horner and Connor, *The Good international Citizen*, 213; Berry, *Cambodia – From Red to Blue*, 298.

314 Notes of the meeting of the Secretary-General with UNTAC Senior Staff, 8 April 1993, UNA, S-1085-0031-0003; Sanderson, "UNTAC: Successes and Failures," 28.

315 Cable Akashi to Annan, 11 June 1993, "communiqué issued by MMWG," UNA, S-0794-0051-0003.

316 Cable Akashi to Annan, 21 June 1993, "Special Core Group Meeting Phnom Penh 17/18 June," UNA, S-0794-0051-0003.

317 Cable Goulding to Boutros-Ghali, 16 June 1993, "Cambodia," UNA, S-0794-0046-0001.

318 Cable Paris to Phnom Penh, "Cambodge: position de l'Australie sur la coopération militaire," ADN, 10POI/1 1312.

319 Cable French Ambassador Phnom Penh to Paris, 20 May 1993, "Coopération militaire – Activisme Australien," ADN, 10POI/1 1312; Cable French Ambassador Canberra to Paris, 22 July 1993, "Relations franco-australiennes au Cambodge," ADN, 10POI/1 1312.



government.<sup>320</sup> The Khmer Rouge understood the game for future influence that was being played and publicly accused France and Australia of trying to seize control of the Cambodian army.<sup>321</sup>

The role Sanderson claimed in the construction of the new Cambodian army indeed went far beyond the Paris Agreements. It also further compromised what was left of UNTAC's impartial peacekeeping role. By halfway through June, the core group officially reached agreement that the UN should pay all Cambodian soldiers, policemen and civil servants of the three factions who swore allegiance to the new Cambodian authorities. It was acknowledged that this would help UNTAC in developing some leverage vis-à-vis the Cambodian factions to enforce respect for the election results and loyalty to the provisional government.<sup>322</sup> The core group defended the decision by emphasising that UNTAC had a "uniquely broad mandate" that provided it with the possibility to take this action.<sup>323</sup> It nonetheless took some time before the necessary 20 million dollars were found to fund the programme, especially because the UN Secretariat was reluctant to request the UN member states to make an additional contribution to an operation that was nearing its end and had already cost so much. Eventually, the solution was found in a trust fund with voluntary contributions by interested member states.<sup>324</sup>

UNTAC took an ambiguous position in the negotiations between the provisional government and the Khmer Rouge. Prince Ranariddh felt that it would be better to have the Khmer Rouge inside a new government of national reconciliation than hostile in the jungle, which would also compensate for his lack of military and administrative power vis-à-vis Hun Sen.<sup>325</sup> On 1 July, after ten weeks of isolation, two Khmer Rouge envoys, Chan Youran and Mak Ben, were sent to Phnom Penh to discuss with Sihanouk the possibility of an advisory role in the new government and joining the new Cambodian army. UNTAC intervened in the negotiations and determined a set of conditions for the Khmer Rouge to join the new Cambodian government and army. These included the opening up of the Khmer Rouge zones for UN military observers, a pledge of allegiance to the new coalition government and a commitment to the constitutional process. The Khmer Rouge did not accept these terms and the talks failed to lead to an agreement.<sup>326</sup> Among the P5 there was little appetite to support a solution that gave the Khmer Rouge a role in the new government. The implicit objective of the Paris Peace Agreement, excluding the Khmer Rouge from a future Cambodian government, had been achieved, albeit not through the electoral process as had been intended. Visiting Cambodia on 6 July, the US ambassador to the United Nations, Madeleine Albright, declared that the United States would "find it very difficult to be supportive of a government that included the Khmer Rouge." This put extra pressure on Sihanouk who knew

---

320 Accord entre le gouvernement de la République Française et le Gouvernement Provisoire du Cambodge relatif à la coopération technique dans le domaine de la Défense, 6 July 1993, UNA, S-0794-0008-0004.

321 "Khmer Rouge accuses West of attempts to control Cambodian army," *AFP*, 6 July 1993.

322 Cable Levitte to French PR New York, 13 June 1993, "Cambodge: confirmation de la réunion des « cinq plus », ADN, 521PO/2/27.

323 Fax Australian Ambassador Phnom Penh to Akashi, 19 June 1993, "Political Elements for a Draft Letter from Cambodia Core Group Countries to UNSG," UNA, S-0794-0051-0003.

324 Letter dated 14 July 1993 from the Secretary-General to the United Nations Security Council, S/26095; Berry, *Cambodia – From Red to Blue*, 301; Cable French Ambassador Phnom Penh to Paris, 19 June 1993, "réunion à haut niveau des cinq plus – Phnom Penh 17–18 juin 1993," ADN, 521PO/2/27.

325 Michael Leifer, "The Khmer Rouge Have a Hard Foot in the Door," *International Herald Tribune*, 23 July 1993.

326 Sheri Praso, "U.N. outlines conditions for Khmer Rouge reintegration," *AFP*, 1 July 1993; Sheri Praso, "Khmer Rouge envoys visit Phnom Penh, new government approved," *AFP*, 1 July 1993;

that his country was in desperate need for American reconstruction aid.<sup>327</sup> The prince publicly cautioned against making a deal with the Khmer Rouge: "We already tried their fruit. It was sweet, but it was also poisonous."<sup>328</sup>

Meanwhile, the Khmer Rouge continued to fight while talking to make it clear that they could not simply be ignored.<sup>329</sup> On 7 July, Khmer Rouge forces under command of general Ta Mok attacked and conquered the historic twelfth-century temples of Preah Vihear at the Thai-Cambodian border.<sup>330</sup> Although of little military significance, the seizure was highly symbolic and a clear provocation.<sup>331</sup> Sihanouk stated furiously that if the Khmer Rouge would not give back the temples and maintain their autonomous zone, he would officially declare them outlaws.<sup>332</sup> UNTAC pretended to play the role of a passive bystander, hinting that its peacekeeping role was over. "This is a problem for the provisional government of Cambodia and the Cambodian armed forces . . . they're responsible for the security of Cambodia," Sanderson declared to journalists.<sup>333</sup> In reality, however, UNTAC actively supported the provisional government. After the donor countries had settled the budgetary question, the Cambodian Armed Forces were officially established on 15 July. Shortly afterwards, UNTAC launched "Operation Paymaster" to pay the soldiers who had sworn allegiance to the provisional government. It was a complex enterprise, in which heavy bags with billions of banknotes were distributed by helicopters across the country. Peacekeepers took care of the security, transportation and allocation of the salaries to the Cambodian soldiers.<sup>334</sup> UNTAC also handed back the 50,000 confiscated weapons to the newly formed Cambodian army which, painfully enough, also included 800 landmines.<sup>335</sup>

On 13 July, Khieu Samphan returned to Phnom Penh with the message that he would open the Khmer Rouge-controlled zones if they were given an advisory role in the new government and a place in the new Cambodian army. But the provisional government did not respond to the proposal. Prince Sihanouk left the country for two months to undergo medical treatment in North Korea and China, which meant that the negotiations between the government and the Khmer Rouge would only continue after UNTAC's departure from Cambodia.<sup>336</sup> In the meantime, the Khmer Rouge continued to murder Vietnamese-Cambodians and engage UNTAC units. River patrol boats of the Philippine Marine detachment in Kratie province were riddled

---

327 Clymer, *The United States and Cambodia*, 164; Interoffice memorandum Ataul Karim to Behrooz Sadry, "Visit of Mr. Khieu Samphan to Phnom Penh on 13 July, 1993," UNA, S-0797-0002-0001; "Hard to back Cambodia if Khmer Rouge in government: US ambassador," *AFP*, 5 July 1993.

328 Ker Munthit, "Beware Their Sweet Fruit," *The Phnom Penh Post*, 2 July 1993.

329 Janet Snyder, "Sihanouk drops Khmer Rouge role under US threat," *Reuters*, 20 July 1993; "Khmer Rouge talk peace while fighting," *Bangkok Post*, 17 August 1993; Philip Shenon, "Khmer Rouge Violence Said to Signal Goal," *The New York Times*, 4 August 1993;

330 "Khmer Rouge guerrillas capture Cambodian temple," *Reuters*, 7 July 1993.

331 Prince Sihanouk had a personal attachment to the temple as it was occupied by Thailand in the late 1950s, but won back by Cambodia three years later when the prince took Thailand to International Court of Justice in The Hague. Sihanouk considered the case as one of his landmark achievements.

332 Kevin Barrington, "Force may be necessary to deal with the Khmer Rouge: Sihanouk," *AFP*, 8 July 1993.

333 Mark Dodd, "U.N. says it can't intervene in temple seizure," *Reuters*, 9 July 1993.

334 John C. Brown, "Army Pay-off Gets Underway," *The Phnom Penh Post*, 13 August 1993.

335 "U.N. hands back cantoned weapons," *AFP*, 22 July 1993; Letter Jason Bleibtreu to Akashi, 2 August 1993, UNA, S-0794-0021-0001; Meeting Akashi with the EP-5, 27 August 1993, UNA, S-0794-0052-0003.

336 Rodney Tasker and Nate Thayer, "Back in the Fold: Khmer Rouge offers to join national army," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 22 July 1993.

with bullets by the Khmer Rouge though its crew miraculously escaped without getting hit.<sup>337</sup> On 1 August, an UNTAC border checkpoint called “CT-1” in Preah Vihear province was first shelled and then attacked by at least a hundred Khmer Rouge fighters. The thirteen peacekeepers from Pakistan manning the post did not defend themselves, and were captured and detained by the Khmer Rouge, before being handed over to the Thai authorities.<sup>338</sup> A day later, the Khmer Rouge attacked a passenger train travelling from Sihanoukville to Phnom Penh. The train was derailed by a mine near Kampot and engaged with machine guns and rockets. French peacekeepers who arrived at the scene shortly after the attack discovered that at least ten Cambodian passengers had been killed and thirty-five were injured. The Khmer Rouge staged a similar attack two weeks later, in which two more Cambodians were killed.<sup>339</sup> It was clear, indeed, that the Khmer Rouge could not be ignored.

Operation Paymaster, as well as the import of military supplies from abroad – despite the fact that the Paris Agreement prohibited this – made it possible for the armed forces of the provisional government to strike back at the Khmer Rouge. On 8 August, the CAF launched a large offensive, marking a very symbolic change, because it was the first time that the non-communist resistance forces fought together with those of the State of Cambodia. While Hun Sen’s forces pushed back the Khmer Rouge in Kompong Thom province, ANKI and KPNLAF troops spearheaded the offensive in north-west Cambodia. After pounding the Khmer Rouge positions with artillery for two days, they captured an important Khmer Rouge base at Phum Chhat, close to the Thai border. It was an important tactical success, and a total of 970 Khmer Rouge fighters and six generals surrendered.<sup>340</sup> In Bangkok, Khieu Samphan called for urgent talks with Phnom Penh to stop what he defined as a “Vietnamese-led campaign against the Khmer Rouge, supported by UN forces.”<sup>341</sup> Although UNTAC did not actively support the offensive, Sanderson described the actions as falling under the provisional government’s “legitimate self-defence.” After all, he said to a journalist, it was the Khmer Rouge who had started the attacks on the UNTAC border checkpoint, conquered the Preah Vihear temples and posed a constant threat to the temples of Angkor Wat. As long as the Khmer Rouge continued to conduct what Sanderson described as “actions that were contrary to the Paris Agreements,” he believed that the provisional government had to deal with the Khmer Rouge “from a position of strength.”<sup>342</sup>

But the CAF-offensive was only a temporary tactical success, and the far from beaten

---

337 Interoffice memorandum Strategic Investigation Team to Force Commander, 20 August, “NADK murder, hostage taking and ransom of Vietnamese villagers at Chhnok Tru,” Kampon Chhnang, UNA, S-1854-0072-0003; Interoffice memorandum Strategic Investigation Team to Force Commander, 14 August 1993, “Killing of Vietnamese at Peam Chhkaok,” UNA, S-1854-0072-0003; Incidents in Cambodia, UNTAC Personnel Detained, UNA, S-0794-0046-0001.

338 Report for FC on the NADK attack on CT-1, 1 August 93, UNA, S-0794-0021-0001; Incidents in Cambodia, UNTAC Personnel Detained, UNA, S-0794-0046-0001; SSUNMO’s comments on the report on NADK’s attack on CT-1 on 01 August 1993, UNA, S-1854-0066-0002; Philip Shenon, “Khmer Rouge Violence Said to Signal Goal,” *The New York Times*, 4 August 1993.

339 Incidents in Cambodia, UNTAC Personnel Detained, UNA, S-0794-0046-0001.

340 Ker Munthit and Chris Burslem, “Army Poised to ‘Sweep’ KR,” *The Phnom Penh Post*, 10 September 1993; William Branigin, “Former Foes Unite to Attack Khmer Rouge,” *The Washington Post*, 20 August 1993; Jennar, *Chroniques Cambodgiennes*, 482; Kevin Barrington, “Offensive over: Khmer Rouge positions captured,” *AFP*, 20 August 1993; William Branigin, “Cambodian Army Seizes Key Khmer Rouge Base,” *The Washington Post*, 21 August 1993.

341 Rodney Tasker “First Blood: Khmer Rouge backs off from government attacks,” *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 2 September 1993.

342 David Brunnstrom, “Khmer Rouge much weaker, U.N. general says,” *Reuters*, 26 August 1993; “Interview with Gen. Sanderson,” *The Phnom Penh Post*, 24 September 1993.

Khmer Rouge showed no mercy to their former allies who were trapped inside the Sok San enclave where the company of Dutch marines had folded its tents on 15 July. The provisional government requested Bangkok to help with the evacuation of the 963 KPMLAF soldiers and their families, but the Thai government did not want to cooperate.<sup>343</sup> UNTAC's support for the provisional government had its limits, as it was careful to become directly involved in the conflict itself. The UNTAC leadership had no appetite either to put its forces at risk in the last weeks of the operation by sending them on a helicopter-borne rescue operation. They played the neutrality card and declared that UNTAC was officially not allowed to use its helicopters to transport any Cambodian military personnel, despite the fact that it had previously done so. As a consequence, the KPMLAF soldiers had no other option than to attempt to escape the encirclement and try to reach the government-controlled area on foot through hostile territory. Forty of them got intercepted by the Khmer Rouge and were massacred.<sup>344</sup>

On 24 September, the Cambodian Constituent Assembly proclaimed a new constitution. The assembly decided to make Cambodia a constitutional monarchy in which Prince Sihanouk became a king who would reign but not rule. Despite the new packaging, it was basically the continuation of the provisional government: Ranariddh was appointed first prime minister and Hun Sen second prime minister, with both receiving the same powers. The ministerial posts were equally divided, with the important interior and defence ministries receiving co-ministers from both parties. This surprising construction was highly original, but in reality, Hun Sen continued to control the military, the police and the bureaucracy, while Ranariddh's power existed mostly on paper.<sup>345</sup>

The promulgation of the new constitution meant the end of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia, and Akashi and Sanderson left the country in the two following days. In his final days as force commander, and already looking back on a satisfactory mission, Sanderson emphasised that the success of UNTAC was especially linked to the respect for the sharp distinction between peacekeeping and peace enforcement. In his farewell message to the UNTAC military component, Sanderson wrote that the successful conclusion of the most ambitious peacekeeping mission ever was a historic moment for Cambodia and for the UN. There was no doubt, he declared, that "UNTAC has been a success in the face of enormous difficulties and frequent predictions of failure." The force commander added that he took great satisfaction from the idea that in achieving this result, UNTAC had "maintained the peacekeeping ethos throughout [the entire] mission."<sup>346</sup> On the eve of his departure from Cambodia, Sanderson stated to a journalist from *The Phnom Penh Post* that UNTAC remained a peacekeeping operation right until the end, and that this had been absolutely essential for its success. "If we had moved to peace enforcement, then we wouldn't have had an election," the force commander stated.<sup>347</sup> However, behind these assertions hid the reality that the elections would not have been possible without outsourcing enforcement tasks to the CPAF. Publicly, however, Sanderson remained very reluctant to give credit to the role of Hun Sen's army, but during his farewell speech at the airfield of Phnom

---

343 "Thais reject request for Cambodian troops passage," *Reuters*, 23 September 1993.

344 Jennar, *Chroniques Cambodgiennes*, 482. Schoonoord, *Mariniers in Cambodja*, 283.

345 Strangio, *Cambodia: From Pol Pot to Hun Sen*, 63.

346 Force commander's order of the day completion of the UNTAC mandate, UNA, S-1854-0024-0001.

347 "Interview with Gen. Sanderson," *The Phnom Penh Post*, 24 September 1993.

Penh on 25 September, the force commander did not omit to “congratulate” the CPAF generals Ke Kim Yan, Tea Banh and Meas Sophea for their cooperation with UNTAC in guaranteeing the security of the elections.<sup>348</sup>

Akashi left Cambodia on a less triumphalist note. Speaking to the press corps at the Foreign Correspondents’ club in Phnom Penh on 13 September, Akashi stated that he did not think that UNTAC had been an unqualified success. When questioned by a reporter why he had decided not to move blue helmets into the zones of the Khmer Rouge, Akashi replied that he had “neither the mandate, nor the equipment, nor the kind of troops which would have incurred 300 lives,” and immediately reprimanded the questioner as a follower of French Brigadier General Michel Loridon. Losing 300 blue helmets, he added, was “more sacrifice than we can bear”.<sup>349</sup> The completely hypothetical number of casualties Loridon had mentioned in his interview with the *Far Eastern Economic Review* (Loridon actually said 200) had clearly become the symbol of the price, which was considered unreasonably high, for alternative courses of action. UNTAC eventually suffered eighty-two fatalities, civilian and military personnel. Twenty of them were killed as a direct result of hostile actions, all of which occurred in the year 1993, especially in the three months around the elections, when the tensions with the Khmer Rouge escalated. Apparently, for the UN and its member states, this was not an unreasonable price for achieving the elections, which was only one part of UNTAC’s objectives in Cambodia. Publicly, Akashi declared that, however satisfied with the end state of the operation, he regretted to leave the problem of a Khmer Rouge insurgency to the new Cambodian government.<sup>350</sup> Away from the cameras and microphones, the special representative admitted that UNTAC’s peacekeeping mandate, falling under Chapter VI of the UN Charter, had prevented him from fully achieving his mission. Before boarding his airplane, Akashi confided to US ambassador Twining that he believed that UNTAC should actually have been a Chapter VII operation.<sup>351</sup> This statement was in line with what he told a visiting delegation of British members of parliament, with whom he shared his view that “a somewhat broader mandate with ‘teeth’ would have provided ‘greater flexibility’ over the question of entering the Khmer Rouge’s zone.” Though the special representative again used UNTAC’s mandate as an excuse, he also admitted to the British MPs that UNTAC had actually been venturing into “chapter six-and-a-half” or even “six-and-three-quarters” in fulfilling its mission.<sup>352</sup>

Akashi publicly elaborated on this when, two months after his departure from Cambodia, he gave a guest lecture at Columbia University in New York about his experience in Cambodia. He explained to his audience that at the beginning of the operation, UNTAC interpreted its right to use force in self-defence in “the most strict sense,” which according to Akashi resulted “in a somewhat passive attitude vis-à-vis the Khmer Rouge.” This narrow interpretation, however, evolved towards

---

348 “U.N. force commander leaves Cambodia,” *AFP*, 25 September 1993; Mark Dodd, “Senior Cambodian peacekeepers depart,” *Reuters*, 26 September 1993.

349 Sheridan Prasso, “UNTAC chief declares mission a ‘qualified success,’” *AFP*, 13 September 1993.

350 Sheila McNulty, “UN Mission Chief Ends Job With Regrets About Khmer Rouge,” *The Associated Press*, 26 September 1993; Sheila McNulty, “Largest U.N. Peacekeeping Mission Ends After Transforming Cambodia,” *The Associated Press*, 29 September 1993.

351 Twining personally believed that this was UNTAC’s main weakness, and argued that the UN Security Council had made UNTAC a Chapter VI operation in order not to scare off potential troop contributors. Interview with Ambassador Charles T. Twining by Charles S. Kennedy, 26 May 2004.

352 Cable Akashi to Annan, 2 March 1993, “visit by British MPs,” UNA, S-0794-0050-0001.

a broader one when the Khmer Rouge became a serious impediment to the accomplishment of its mission.<sup>353</sup> In a later paper by Akashi, he more explicitly made the point that “the UNTAC military leadership” – meaning Sanderson – “did not initially have a clear understanding of the degree to which the use of force was permitted under the rules of engagement,” and that this mindset only changed after UN headquarters clarified the broad possibilities of interpretation for legitimate self-defence.<sup>354</sup> It is possible that the message Goulding sent in January 1993 to all heads of missions might have given some extra incentive to interpret the notion of self-defence more liberally, but the decision to press on with the elections while the Khmer Rouge did not remain passive as had been hoped, automatically implied that UNTAC would have to use force in defence of the mission.

Sanderson later acknowledged that it was “in the light of changed circumstances” that the notion of self-defence “was extended to the use of minimum force and proportionate response in defence of the electoral process.”<sup>355</sup> But the central point in his post-UNTAC publications remains that the key to UNTAC’s success was the strict adherence to the peacekeeping principles and preventing the operation to dabble into enforcement. Scholars have generally endorsed this position by arguing that the force commander made the right decision to adhere to the traditional peacekeeping approach, with Trevor Findlay’s influential 1995 SIPRI report about the Cambodian peace operation leading the way.<sup>356</sup> However, the argument that UNTAC maintained its impartiality and did not use military force to impose its mandate is difficult to maintain when taking into consideration that UNTAC outsourced the active use of force to the CPAF during the elections, and thereafter supported the provisional government’s counterinsurgency operation against the continuing threat of the Khmer Rouge. UNTAC was about much more than implementing a peace agreement in Cambodia. It was about demonstrating the potential of multidimensional UN peacekeeping as an instrument for post-Cold War conflict resolution. In defence of this mission, the end justified the means. Paradoxically, the very principles of UN peacekeeping were violated in protecting the reputation and future of UN peacekeeping, and more broadly, the United Nations Organization itself.

### **After UNTAC: virtual peace and democracy**

UNTAC’s presence in Cambodia laid the groundwork for a pluralistic political culture. The elections, in which twenty political parties participated, brought the notion of democracy to a population that had been largely unfamiliar with it. Thirty newspapers were founded, four human rights associations took office and many other NGOs were active in Cambodia after UNTAC. The successful repatriation of 372,000 Cambodian refugees living in refugee camps in Thailand was also a great humanitarian achievement. But UNTAC’s failure to disarm and demobilise the factions’ armies had a lasting impact on Cambodian society. After UNTAC’s departure from

353 Akashi, “The Challenge of Peacekeeping in Cambodia,” 214. This article is based on the lecture given at the School of International and Public Affairs of Columbia University on 29 November 1993.

354 Akashi, “An assessment of the UNTAC,” 163.

355 Sanderson, “Dabbling into War,” 157.

356 Findlay, *Cambodia*, 129; Schear, “Riding the Tiger,” 174; Brocades Zaalberg, *Soldiers and Civil Power*, 157; Brown and Zasloff, *Cambodia Confounds the Peacemakers*, 104; Whalan, *How Peace Operations Work*, 102, 105; Berdal and Leifer, “Cambodia,” 25; Heininger, *Peacekeeping in Transition*, 136.



Cambodia, the country was not the peaceful democracy the Paris Agreements had envisioned. The Khmer Rouge were still in control of some 20 per cent of Cambodian territory, maintaining an army of 10,000 active fighters and their lucrative trade in logs and gemstones at the Thai border continuing unchecked. In April 1994, the Khmer Rouge and the new Royal Cambodian Armed Forces (RCAF) were involved in the heaviest fighting the country had seen since the Vietnamese withdrawal from Cambodia in 1989. Negotiations with the Khmer Rouge conducted by Prince Sihanouk failed to lead to an agreement or a cease-fire, and the government decided instead to officially declare the Khmer Rouge outlaws in July. The Khmer Rouge responded with a campaign of violence and the formation of a “government of national unity” in Preah Vihear province.<sup>357</sup>

The quasi-democratic power-sharing construction between Ranariddh and Hun Sen was uneasy and unstable from the start. It was a marriage of convenience, maintained by FUNCINPEC because it had no choice and maintained by the CPP as a necessity for international recognition and to keep foreign aid flowing in. The donor community pragmatically accepted the mirage of reforms, although violations of human rights were commonplace and a free press was more fiction than reality.<sup>358</sup> Though Ranariddh had won the elections and held the title of first prime minister, it was Hun Sen who maintained the real power. Ranariddh grew increasingly frustrated with being constantly outmanoeuvred by Hun Sen, being treated as a “puppet,” and in March 1996 openly threatened to leave the coalition if his party would not be given more power.<sup>359</sup>

Tensions were temporarily interrupted in August 1996 when Hun Sen suddenly announced that Ieng Sary, known as Brother Number Three and deputy prime minister of the Pol Pot regime, defected to the government. Hun Sen, who had always pushed for outlawing the Khmer Rouge, had made a spectacular turnabout by cordially receiving and pardoning the secretive Khmer Rouge figurehead, while claiming the credits for the surrender of some 2,000 Khmer Rouge fighters who benefitted from a government amnesty programme.<sup>360</sup> This major success triggered further competition between the co-prime ministers to win the remaining Khmer Rouge leaders into their camp. To strengthen his position vis-à-vis Hun Sen, Ranariddh secretly negotiated with Khieu Samphan in Paris and the remote Khmer Rouge stronghold in Preah Vihear about joining his newly formed anti-CPP coalition, the National United Front (NUF). As Khieu Samphan and Ranariddh were close to making a deal, the Khmer Rouge movement imploded further. On 9 June 1997, Pol Pot ordered the murder of his defence minister Son Sen, along with his wife and twelve other people. The massacre led to an internal rebellion, led by General Ta Mok. Pol Pot was captured and sentenced to life imprisonment after a bizarre show trial in the jungle.

But Pol Pot’s capture did not stop the tensions between the two prime ministers in the protracted run-up to the 1998 general elections. Both Ranariddh and Hun Sen reinforced their personal bodyguard battalions and armed clashes soon broke out. Seeing his position threatened by Ranariddh’s increasing combativeness, arms importations, and ostensibly successful negotiations with the Khmer Rouge, Hun Sen took decisive action. On 5 and 6 July 1997, his

357 Cable Widyono to Goulding, 8 May 1994, “Weekly report No 3 for the week of May 2–8 1994,” UNA, S-1829-0273-0005; Widyono, *Dancing in shadows*, 149; The RCAF, led by 2,000 generals and 10,000 colonels, was plagued by corruption and incompetence and could not prevent the Khmer Rouge forces making impressive military gains.

358 Julio A. Jeldres, “Cambodia’s Fading Hopes,” *Journal of Democracy* 7, no.1 (1996): 154; Strangio, *Cambodia: From Pol Pot to Hun Sen*, 220.

359 Sorpong Peou, “Hun Sen’s pre-emptive coup: Causes and Consequences,” *Southeast Asian Affairs* (1998), 87.

360 Brown and Zasloff, *Cambodia confounds the peacemakers*, 255–56; Widyono, *Dancing in Shadows*, 232–36.

army unleashed an offensive with tanks and APCs on strategic positions in Phnom Penh. After thirty-six hours of fierce fighting, Hun Sen's forces took the FUNCINPEC headquarters. None of Cambodia's leaders were in the country when the fighting occurred. Ranariddh had fled to France the day before. King Sihanouk was in Beijing for medical treatment and therefore unable to call both parties to order. Hun Sen returned from "vacation" in Vietnam and "took control" of the situation, arguing that his forces had only taken pre-emptive action against Ranariddh's provocations and colluding with the Khmer Rouge. The head of Ranariddh's army, together with many of his troops, was summarily executed, while remaining forces retreated to the Thai border where they succeeded to defend their last stronghold of O Smach with support from Khmer Rouge forces. FUNCINPEC officials fled Phnom Penh and abandoned their seats in parliament and positions in government. With Hun Sen in power in Phnom Penh and the royalists and the Khmer Rouge pushed into the north-eastern jungles, Cambodia seemed to be back to where it had been in the 1980s.<sup>361</sup> Although there was disagreement among observers whether Hun Sen's intervention should be described as a coup d'état, the consequence was that FUNCINPEC was completely crushed, split into five different factions, and most of its members became refugees or went into hiding. Hun Sen emerged as the strongman who consolidated his power and purged the government bureaucracy. He effectively removed any political opposition and silenced the pro-opposition media for the year leading to the elections.<sup>362</sup>

Ranariddh protested in foreign capitals and at the United Nations against Hun Sen's coup, comparing it to Pol Pot's takeover in 1975, but nobody really took the prince seriously. The UN declared Cambodia's seat at the General Assembly vacant and ASEAN postponed the admission of Cambodia into the regional organisation. Although key donor countries did freeze a large part of their aid programmes, which constituted half of Cambodia's annual government budget, they refrained from officially condemning Hun Sen's actions as a coup d'état, acknowledging that both sides had clearly been guilty of building up their military forces and courting the Khmer Rouge.<sup>363</sup> Mediation by Japan made Hun Sen agree to a plan that allowed Ranariddh to return to Cambodia and take part in the elections. Hun Sen understood that Ranariddh's participation was necessary to uphold the international credibility of the poll. This was important because Cambodia's state finances, at this stage, still depended for more than half of its total budget on Western aid. As Ranariddh returned to Cambodia, the prince was put on a show trial, convicted for raising armed forces against the government and colluding with the Khmer Rouge. Following the Japanese plan, his sentence of thirty years in prison was reversed after receiving a royal pardon from his king father, just in time to allow him to participate in the elections.<sup>364</sup>

Although the electoral process of the elections on 26 July 1998 was clearly flawed, with the opposition silenced and the CPP in full control of the electoral machinery, the polling itself was calmer than in 1993, which was the only reference available. Again it was the massive voter turnout of 93.74 per cent of the registered electorate that revitalised hopes for the Cambodian

361 Peou, "Hun Sen's pre-emptive coup," 94–96.

362 Sue Downie, "Cambodia's 1998 Election: Understanding Why it Was Not a 'Miracle on the Mekong,'" *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 54, no.1 (2000): 48; Brown and Zasloff, *Cambodia confounds the peacemakers*, 249, 263.

363 Chanborey Cheunboran, *Cambodia's China Strategy: Security Dilemmas of Embracing the Dragon* (New York: Routledge, 2021), 70; Widyono, *Dancing in Shadows*, 261.

364 Sorpong Peou, "Cambodia in 1998, from despair to hope?," *Asian Survey* 39, no. 1 (January/February 1999): 21; Widyono, *Dancing in Shadows*, 262.

democracy. The CPP came out first with 41.4 per cent of the vote, FUNCINPEC second with 31.7 per cent, thus reversing the result of the 1993 election. Breakaway FUNCINPEC member Sam Rainsy's party received a surprising 14.4 per cent, especially from the educated urban youth. Hun Sen received most votes in the countryside where the CPP was in control of practically every village and where stability-longing Cambodians were almost completely secluded from political debate.<sup>365</sup> Although international observers judged the July 1998 election itself to credibly reflect the will of the Cambodian people, it was nothing like a free and fair exercise, with a pre-election period filled with assassinations, intimidation and manipulation.<sup>366</sup> Keen however to prevent a relapse into civil war, and conscious that Hun Sen was vital for the stability of the country, foreign governments and observers approved of the elections that provided a way out of Cambodia's cycle of political instability.<sup>367</sup> As the CPP had not obtained enough seats for a majority in parliament, a second coalition between the CPP and FUNCINPEC was established, this time with Hun Sen as the only prime minister. Ranariddh contended himself with the lucrative position of president of the National Assembly, as he had lost the power struggle against his rival.<sup>368</sup> Cambodians and international observers began to question what was left of the UN's self-declared "success" of 1993. Scholars became more inclined to acknowledge that UNTAC had only succeeded in establishing a "virtual peace" in Cambodia and that the ideal of a liberal peace had clearly failed.<sup>369</sup>

The elections occurred shortly after Pol Pot died of a heart attack in April 1998, which caused the final disintegration of the Khmer Rouge. Khieu Samphan and Nuon Chea (Brother Number Two) accepted Hun Sen's amnesty offer and defected to the government in December of the same year. A few months later, the government troops overran Anlong Veng and captured General Ta Mok and Comrade Duch, the former chief of the notorious S-21 Tuol Sleng torture prison from which only twelve out of 20,000 detainees survived. With all of the remaining Khmer Rouge leadership in government hands, the United Nations called for an international trial, but Hun Sen only accepted a Cambodian court as he wanted to retain control over potential prosecutions. Hun Sen, as well as other key members of the CPP, had been former Khmer Rouge commanders themselves and probably feared to be persecuted themselves. After years of negotiations between the Cambodian government and the United Nations, a mixed tribunal, the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC), comprised of both international and Cambodian judges and lawyers, was opened in 2006. Eventually, only three members of the Khmer Rouge regime were convicted by the ECCC in the thirteen years of its existence. Comrade Duch was the first defendant to be convicted in 2010, and the only Khmer Rouge leader to admit

---

365 Brinkley, *Cambodia's Curse*, 142; Widyono, *Dancing in Shadows*, 267.

366 Downie, "Cambodia's 1998 Election," 49–52.

367 International Crisis Group, *Cambodia's Flawed Elections: Why Cambodia will not be Ready for Free and Fair Elections on 26 July 1998*, ICG Report No2, 16 June 1998; International Crisis Group, "Cambodia's Elections Turn Sour Cambodia Report," 10 September 1998.

368 Widyono, *Dancing in Shadows*, 262.

369 Kao Kim Hourn, "Background paper" in *The Nexus between Peacekeeping and Peace-building debriefing and lessons, report of the 1999 Singapore Conference*, eds. Nassrine Azimi and Chang Li Lin (London: Kluwer Law International, 2000), 159; Oliver P. Richmond and Jason Franks, "Liberal Hubris? Virtual Peace in Cambodia," *Security Dialogue*, 38, no.1 (March 2007); Paris, "Peacebuilding and the Limits of Liberal Internationalism," 65; Roland Paris, "Peacekeeping and the Constraints of Global Culture," *European Journal of international Relations* 9, no. 3 (2003), 455; Sorpong Peou, "The UN's modest impact on Cambodia's democracy," in *The UN Role in Promoting Democracy – Between Ideals and Reality*, eds. Edward Newman and Roland Rich (Tokyo: United Nations University Press 2004); Sorpong Peou, "Cambodia in 1997: Back to Square One?," *Asian Survey* 38, no.1 (January 1998).

his guilt and ask for forgiveness.<sup>370</sup> Nuon Chea (Brother Number Two) was given a life sentence in 2014, but died in prison five years later. Ieng Sary died during his trial in 2013 and his wife, Ieng Thirith, a former minister for social affairs with senile dementia, was declared unfit to stand trial and was released in 2012. On 22 September 2022, in its final decision before dissolution, the court rejected the appeal of 91-year-old Khieu Samphan, who had been sentenced to life imprisonment for genocide and crimes against humanity.<sup>371</sup>

The fact that the West had been able to use its leverage of aid-packages to force Ranariddh's return after his ousting in the 5-6 July 1997 coup, made Hun Sen realise that he needed financial and diplomatic support from China. The Cambodian prime minister pleased Beijing by closing Taiwan's trade office in Phnom Penh, after accusing Ranariddh – who maintained close ties to Taiwanese businesses – of receiving Taiwanese financial support for his military build-up. Beijing quickly delivered a \$2.8 million shipment of military materiel to Hun Sen's security forces and provided a \$10 million loan to compensate for the suspended aid flows from Western countries after the coup.<sup>372</sup> Developing a close relationship with China also allowed Hun Sen to distance himself from Hanoi, and undo himself of the image of being the man who thanked his position to the Vietnamese.

In the elections of the following two decades, the CPP maintained its parliamentary majority but millions of Cambodians voted for the Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP), a new unified opposition party led by Sam Rainsy. In the run-up to the elections of 2018, Hun Sen's government launched a crackdown in which politicians and members of the opposition were attacked and arrested. Sam Rainsy was forced into exile overseas and banned from political activity. Kem Sokha, who replaced Rainsy as CNRP president, was also arrested and charged with conspiring with foreign governments against the CPP. Protestations from the West were having no impact. With Beijing's backing, Hun Sen did not need to please the West anymore through upholding the appearance of democracy. Discourses about human rights, threats of sanctions and Western support for the Cambodian opposition only pushed Hun Sen closer to Beijing.<sup>373</sup> It was a historic turn. Whereas in 1988 Hun Sen had described China as "the root of all that was evil in Cambodia," the prime minister now repeatedly declared that China was Cambodia's "most trustworthy friend."<sup>374</sup>

Cambodia has much to offer in exchange for Chinese aid, investments and political support. First, China has privileged access to Cambodia's natural resources. The Thai logging and mining companies of the 1990s have now largely been replaced by Chinese.<sup>375</sup> More important, however, is the fact that Phnom Penh has become an important geostrategic partner for Beijing. Since Cambodia joined ASEAN in 1999, it has increasingly defended China with regard to the

---

370 Strangio, *Cambodia: From Pol Pot to Hun Sen*, 240–43.

371 Adrien Le Gal, "Au Cambodge, bilan mitigé pour le tribunal chargé de juger les dirigeants des Khmers rouges," *Le Monde*, 9 October 2022.

372 Cheunboran, *Cambodia's China Strategy*, 63.

373 Sebastian Strangio, *In the Dragon's Shadow: Southeast Asia in the Chinese century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020) 92, 102.

374 Cheunboran, *Cambodia's China Strategy*, 2.

375 Daniel C. O'Neill, "Who Wins in China's 'Win-Win' Relations with Cambodia," in *The Deer and the Dragon: Southeast Asia and China in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, ed. Donald K. Emmerson (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020), 249; Cheunboran, *Cambodia's China Strategy*, 194.

territorial disputes in the South China Sea, using its veto power to block any joint statement by the regional organisation against China's illegal island-building activities.<sup>376</sup> China is currently building military facilities at the strategically located Ream Naval Base near Sihanoukville, which will become Beijing's second overseas outpost capable of hosting large naval vessels (after Djibouti). The demolition of US-funded facilities on Ream Naval Base and the relocation of a Vietnamese friendship monument off the site are symbolic for the centrality of Cambodia in the struggle for strategic influence in the Indo-Pacific region.<sup>377</sup>

In the past years, Hun Sen has been making his final reckoning with the international intervention in his country's affairs, which started with UNTAC.<sup>378</sup> He has publicly glossed over UNTAC's heritage, claiming that peace only came to Cambodia when the Khmer Rouge imploded as a result of his "win-win policy" in the late 1990s in which he offered Khmer Rouge figureheads and soldiers amnesty. He explicitly warned foreign historians not to exclusively focus on UNTAC, but also study his actions in the second half of the 1990s.<sup>379</sup> Although not entirely agreeing with Hun Sen's fierce criticism on UNTAC, Akashi has given the Cambodian prime minister the credit he claimed when the former UNTAC-chief wrote in 2012: "One has to pay tribute to Mr Hun Sen, the Prime Minister, for having achieved the final demise of the Khmer Rouge."<sup>380</sup> It is true that the amnesty policy constituted a very effective strategy to bring the Khmer Rouge insurgency to its knees. And indeed, peace and stability only really returned to Cambodia in 1998, after the Khmer Rouge movement disintegrated and the power struggle between Hun Sen and Ranariddh came to an end. Since then, Cambodian democracy, however, has only existed in name.

---

376 Strangio, *In the Dragon's Shadow*, 91.

377 Ellen Nakashima and Cate Cadell, "China secretly building naval facility in Cambodia, Western officials say," *The Washington Post*, 6 June 2022; Jack Detsch, "U.S. Looks to Check Chinese Advances at Cambodian Naval Base," *Foreign Policy*, 5 December 2022.

378 Strangio, *In the Dragon's Shadow*, 93.

379 Leonie Kijewski, "Hun Sen says he, not Untac, brought peace to Cambodia in 90s," *The Phnom Penh Post*, 5 January 2018; "Hun Sen: Peace brought by Khmers, not 'foreign hands,'" *The Phnom Penh Post*, 26 March 2018; Brice Pedroletti, "Au Cambodge, l'anniversaire des accords de Paris donne lieu à des interprétations divergentes," *Le Monde*, 25 October 2021; Ry Sochan, "Hun Sen blasts analysts for UNTAC-era nostalgia," *The Phnom Penh Post*, 8 November 2021.

380 Akashi, "An assessment of the UNTAC," 154.