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

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Conclusion

The final outcome of UNTAC seemed almost magical, particularly when compared to the news that was coming from other parts of the world where UN peacekeeping operations were already derailing. In early June 1993, just a few days after the world had been pleasantly surprised by the successful elections in Cambodia, twenty-four Pakistani peacekeepers were killed in Somalia, which instigated a Security Council-condoned hunt for warlord Mohamed Farrah Aidid. In early October 1993, when the new Cambodian government was installed and the last blue helmets were leaving Cambodia, UNOSOM II turned into a catastrophe when eighteen US soldiers and hundreds of Somali fighters and civilians were killed in firefights in the streets of Mogadishu. Without doubt, this stark contrast has had a strong influence on the generally positive verdict on the UN operation in Cambodia. In the following years, the atrocities committed under UN eyes in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia further contributed to making Cambodia stand out as a mission where the UN had obtained results, instead of being humiliated. Rare were the observers who contested the UN's triumphant self-congratulatory statements and endorsed the plain but sharp observation of *AFP*'s Cambodia correspondent Sheridan Prasso: "There is a reason why the U.N. operation in Cambodia looks so good. It's because operations in Somalia and the former Yugoslavia look so bad."[1]

Indeed, UNTAC's outcome was good news for the United Nations, because it allowed the organisation to show the world that it was able to bring such a large and complex operation to a satisfactory end. The narrative that UN peacekeeping could be successful as long as it strictly adhered to the traditional principles of UN peacekeeping, was convenient for the UN and its member states, especially after the escalating operations in Somalia and the former Yugoslavia. This narrative has been readily adopted in scholarly analyses of the 1990s and still informs current academic debates about UN peacekeeping. This study suggests that it is time to reconsider this interpretation. The increased accessibility of archival sources has made it possible to study the complex nuances that drove the Cambodian peace process and get a more detailed understanding of what determined the contradictory outcome of this largely forgotten peacekeeping operation. By illuminating the role of agency, this study allows us to see more clearly the structures behind UN peacekeeping operations in the 1990s. Cambodia was a vital experiment in the laboratory of peacekeeping in the post-Cold War era, and the imperative of success was a driving force behind this operation. Failure was simply not an option because the role of the United Nations as the guarantor of international peace and security was too strongly attached to it.

The process of enforcing success began with the Paris Peace Agreements, which resulted from the desire of the great powers to find a comprehensive political settlement to end the Third Indochina War rather than from the spirit of compromise among the Cambodian factions. Finalising a comprehensive political settlement to redefine great power relations in the post-Cold War period was of greater importance than achieving a sustainable peace in Cambodia. As the

1 Sheridan Prasso, "Cambodia: A $3 Billion Boondoggle," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 51, no. 2 (March/April 1995): 36.

Cambodian factions did not feel equally satisfied, the Paris Agreements offered an unstable peace and an uncertain point of departure for those who were tasked to implement it. The Cambodian case demonstrates that a long-negotiated peace settlement does not necessarily provide the best basis for a successful peacekeeping operation, because it does not guarantee the commitment of all parties to the peace. The incomplete reconciliation among Cambodians was the first structural factor that impeded UNTAC from completely achieving its objectives. Connected to this was the fact that the Khmer Rouge were never truly committed to the peace process. Although some scholars have argued that the Khmer Rouge were willing to implement the peace agreements, this study reveals that, even before UNTAC's arrival, Pol Pot decided to use the Paris Agreements as a strategic weapon to achieve his politico-military objectives, as Cambodia-watchers such as Ben Kiernan, Michael Vickery, Raoul Jennar and Christophe Peschoux had been predicting and suggesting all along. The sudden disappearance of the relatively flexible General Mao Savy, and the subsequent stonewalling of UN efforts, while constantly proclaiming full adherence to the Paris Agreements, were unmistakable indications that the strategy outlined by Pol Pot on 7 February 1992 was immediately put into practice.

The second reason that put the operation on a collision course from the start was the fact the UN was strongly focussed on executing its own implementation plan while ignoring the Khmer Rouge's strategy of using the Paris Agreements to legitimise their obstruction. Despite the ringing of alarm bells by UNAMIC-commander Loridon, the UN Secretariat in New York remained unalerted about the Khmer Rouge's obstructive behaviour for too long, as it was preoccupied with managing a sweeping reorganisation and an ambitious global agenda. At the very moment that the new Secretary-General began writing his *Agenda for Peace*, the UN operation in Cambodia was already dangerously unravelling. Lise Morjé Howard has been correct to argue that there were "organisational dysfunctions" in the first months of the UN deployment in Cambodia. Herman Salton's finding that the UN Secretariat's internal fragmentation negatively affected the UN peacekeeping operation in Rwanda, is also true for Cambodia. However, the dominant idea in the existing scholarship that the Khmer Rouge refused to disarm in reaction to UNTAC's delayed deployment and its inability to control the SOC administration is an incorrect interpretation, because it ignores the Khmer Rouge strategy of using the peace agreements as their "weapon" and thwarting the peace process from the beginning. Whereas consent was not withdrawn in an official way, there was no cooperation in the field. Khieu Samphan seems to have successfully charmed the Secretary-General with his sophisticated letters, making Boutros-Ghali believe that the real problem facing UNTAC was not the Khmer Rouge's limited commitment, but rather getting money and troops as quickly as possible to Cambodia. As these efforts were not served by the news of a disintegrating peace agreement, a posture of keeping up the appearance of success was adopted. Contrary to what has been argued by Sorpong Peou, UNTAC went to great lengths to address the Khmer Rouge's alleged "security concerns" and made important concessions in order to meet their demands and obtain cooperation. But confidence building measures, such as Sanderson's decision to give priority to the early deployment of UNTAC checkpoints at the border with Vietnam, did not satisfy the Khmer Rouge who only responded by demanding an even higher price for their cooperation. Wishful thinking, expressed by a willingness to believe the Khmer Rouge's words rather than judge them on their acts, resulted in UNTAC sleepwalking into

the failure of disarmament.

More important was UNTAC's inability to exploit the momentum of its arrival in March 1992 to salvage the situation and make the difference with UNAMIC sufficiently perceptible. UNTAC's ability to assert its authority and make its presence felt was not only impeded by the lack of resources and the slow arrival of troops, as has been traditionally argued, but also by the initial reluctance of the cautiously operating force commander to deploy UN forces to Kompong Thom, and the subsequent unwillingness of the Indonesian contingent to obey orders. UNTAC's inability to consolidate this fragile local cease-fire through a swift deployment of UNTAC troops to the province was, painfully enough, in no small part due to behind-the-scenes tensions and competition between the leading sponsors of the Cambodian peace process. UNTAC failed to capitalise on its awe and the wait-and-see attitude which the Khmer Rouge adopted in the first weeks of the operation, losing important momentum, authority and credibility in this early stage of deployment while it waited for the total build-up of the unwieldy UN force. This strongly reduced the chances for UNTAC to achieve its first main objective of disarming and demobilising the factions.

Deputy Force Commander Loridon's public criticism on the UN's diplomatic methods made the position of the French general untenable, but some of his provocative remarks touched upon a real question: whether it was possible to accomplish UNTAC's objectives without taking some measure of risk. His urgings for more assertiveness and bluff, not for peace enforcement as the conventional narrative suggests, led to an immediate clash with Sanderson. Whether the Khmer Rouge would have opened fire on UN peacekeepers entering their zones is uncertain, but this constituted a risk Sanderson was unwilling to take, and the domestic political context in Australia was an important determining factor in this assessment. Sanderson's cautious approach was fully in sync with the position of the Australian government that had publicly promised that UNTAC would be a non-coercive peacekeeping operation involving limited risks. The narrative of achieving peace in Cambodia through peacekeeping rather than peace enforcement was important during the operation to ensure that at least two leading and symbolically important troop-contributing countries, Australia and Japan, would be able to sustain their commitment to the operation. The struggle of the governments in Canberra and Tokyo to find a balance between their ambition to make a strategically important contribution to the operation in Cambodia that aimed to redefine their nations' identities in the post-Cold War world, and a domestic political climate demanding zero casualties, as well as the weight of their history in the region, conditioned a risk-averse conduct of command. Whereas Loridon believed that a certain military dynamic was required to assert UNTAC's freedom of movement and authority, Sanderson had much less manoeuvre space to accept the risk of escalation and casualties, as it could potentially lead to a forced withdrawal of the Australian contingent, and an unacceptable political failure for the government in Canberra. The force commander, by character more inclined to define his role more as a diplomat than as a soldier, had to take these domestic political dimensions into account.

This context puts the alleged low-tolerance for casualties among troop-contributing countries in a more accurate perspective. Apart from Australia and Japan – two countries that did not contribute any infantry battalions that would be ordered to move into Khmer Rouge territory – there is no evidence to support the assertion that troop-contributing countries uttered

protestations against an approach that involved more risks. Moreover, this narrative is contradicted by the official proposal from Kuala Lumpur to deploy Malaysian and Indonesian forces into the Khmer Rouge zone in an effort to deblock the situation. Despite the fact that this "ASEAN solution" enjoyed support in New York and among members of the P5, the force commander's concern that it could create divisions within UNTAC, and the idea that it would be a concession to the Khmer Rouge, prevented the initiative from being implemented.

The fourth factor that caused disaster for the disarmament of the factions was New York's pressure to move forward with the operation despite an implementation plan that might have reflected the Paris Agreements, but was unadopted to the realities of the situation in Cambodia as well as the limited resources at the disposal of the United Nations. It is important to note that the faultiness of the implementation plan was acknowledged from the beginning by the UN Secretary-General himself, who openly admitted that it required adjustment along the way. Moreover, the plan's feasibility was broadly questioned, not only by the highest UN military commanders in Cambodia, but also by the members of UN Security Council and those of the core group. But their explicit calls for a more flexible approach were ignored by Akashi, Goulding and the Secretary-General who clung frenetically to the plan as it stood while they diligently looked for the necessary funds to realise the operation. From the outset, the focus of the UN leadership was more on organising elections within the pre-established timeframe and budget than on achieving the first major objective of disarming the Cambodian factions, which the peace agreements stipulated as a vital precondition for the creation of a neutral political environment and the creation of a sustainable peace. They had boxed themselves in with declarations that the elections could not be held any later than May 1993. As a consequence, the operation was driven by the timetable, which meant that no time could be wasted on inconvenient contingencies such as a party that deliberately tried to delay the peace process. By contrast, in the smaller UN peacekeeping operations that were deployed at the time, disarmament and demobilisation were completed successfully because the UN leadership was less in hurry and more flexible. Like UNTAC, ONUSAL in El Salvador (1991-1995) also encountered the problem of factions refusing to proceed with the demobilisation of their troops. When this led to a crisis in the fall of 1992, Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali personally intervened and brokered a new agreement between the parties. The subsequent successful DDR-process was crucial in the transition to peace in El Salvador.[2] The same goes for ONUMOZ in Mozambique (1992-1994), where the UN insisted that elections could only take place after the disarmament and demobilisation of the parties had been completed. Boutros-Ghali travelled to Mozambique in October 1993 for direct talks between the parties to overcome the delaying demobilisation process, which together with Special Representative Aldo Ajello's flexibility and pragmatism, resulted in a revision of the unrealistically ambitious timetable and a breakthrough with regard to the stalling demobilisation.[3] Yet, whereas offering carrots to the parties was a sufficient measure to break the deadlocks in Mozambique and El Salvador, it is unlikely that this would have moved the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia.

Despite the fact that it was officially a purely military decision to determine the starting

2 Lise Morjé Howard, "United Nations Observer Mission in El Salvador," in *The Oxford Handbook of United Nations Peacekeeping Operations*, eds. Joachim A. Koops et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 356.

3 Mats Berdal, "United Nations Operation in Mozambique (ONUMOZ)," in *The Oxford Handbook of United Nations Peacekeeping Operations*, eds. Joachim A. Koops et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 422.

date for Phase Two, the force commander's reservations were completely disregarded by the UN's civilian leadership, which was more preoccupied with maintaining the appearance of success than with finding solutions for the unravelling situation on the ground. "Success", at his stage of the operation, was already defined in New York as achieving the final political objective: organising elections and putting in place a new legitimate Cambodian government within the predetermined time frame. This was what military sociologist Christopher Dandeker described as the "satisfactory condition" that had to be achieved.[4] The UN, with higher priorities in other parts of the world, lacked the ability to be flexible, stop the operation and change course. The Secretary-General personally prevented the reconvening of the Paris Conference, which was a pivotal decision and a lost opportunity to rethink the failing disarmament process. Undoubtedly, the Khmer Rouge would have taken a firm line in a bid to gain more concessions, but it would at least have clarified the situation, and allowed for a concerted effort of international pressure. However, a decision to go back to Paris would have caused further delays and amount to overtly admitting that the operation was not going according to plan, which risked to blemish the UN's renewed credibility. The heavy UN machine had been set in motion, and putting the system in reverse was considered too drastic a measure as one feared detrimental implications for the UN's ability to find money and troops, not only for UNTAC, but also for other UN peacekeeping operations elsewhere. This element must sound familiar to scholars of military history. Forms of inflexibility, such as excessive caution and insisting that all is going according to plan while this is evidently not the case, have been identified by historians as key aspects that often lead to the failure of a military campaign.[5]

The problem of the Khmer Rouge's feigned cooperation became undeniable when UNTAC's leadership was being halted by a bamboo pole in Pailin. Although the incident merely confirmed the position the Khmer Rouge had maintained for the previous five months, it was a highly significant moment that not only symbolised UNTAC's powerlessness, but also constituted a turning point in Akashi's policy. Views about Akashi's leadership in Cambodia might have been influenced by the reputation he acquired when leading UNPROFOR in Bosnia, but as special representative in Cambodia, he advocated much more resolute action than is assumed in the literature. The bamboo pole incident prompted Akashi to believe that patient diplomacy alone would be insufficient to get the Khmer Rouge to cooperate and that it was time to apply more sticks than carrots. Whereas in most accounts, the policy of Sanderson and Akashi is explained in the same breath as nonconfrontational, in actuality, their views differed significantly. Pressure from different sides to act more assertively further encouraged Akashi to distance himself from New York and adopt a French-promoted policy of trying to force the Khmer Rouge to be reasonable by cutting their income gained through the trade in logs and gems with Thai businesses. But the force commander resisted the idea of using his soldiers to seal-off the Thai-Cambodian border, and successfully persuaded Akashi to drop the idea through the infeasible plan for Operation Dovetail.

In Cambodia, the initiative was largely in the field because there was no clear political guidance: not from the UN Security Council which was divided nor from the UN Secretariat, which had a limited appreciation of the situation. Behind the scenes, several countries, but

4 Dandeker, "From victory to success," 26.

5 Robert Pois and Philip Langer, *Command Failure in War: Psychology and Leadership* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004). Cited in: Lawrence Freedman, *Command: The Politics of Military operations from Korea to Ukraine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022), 4.

especially France and Australia, tried to push the operation into opposite directions through their formal and informal channels of influence. As co-chairman of the Paris conference and president of the Security Council, France was, in theory at least, the leading country in the Cambodian peace operation. But both the French plan to pressure the Khmer Rouge into cooperation with UNTAC-implemented economic sanctions as well as to give Prince Sihanouk the power to save the peace process stranded, not in the least because of Australian resistance. Ultimately, the Australians were more successful in determining the course of the peacekeeping operation, revealing that, as in any military operation, it simply matters who is in command. Canberra had well understood this at an early stage when it lobbied to deliver the force commander. Australian foreign minister Evans was the first to explicitly redefine the strategic objective of the mission by suggesting to forget about disarmament and concentrate on organising elections. It was a strategy that served Canberra's objective of avoiding an escalation and achieving a presentable success. Although Akashi was officially at the helm, Sanderson had a stronger voice with regard to policy decisions in the field. Despite Security Council resolution 792, which provided UNTAC with additional political support to enforce the economic blockade on the Khmer Rouge, Sanderson avoided to undertake any action that might provoke them. The consequence of this policy was that the embargo on logs and gems was largely ineffective. It was not so much that UNTAC lacked the power, the means or the mandate to pressure the Khmer Rouge towards compliance, as scholars have generally claimed; rather, it was the unwillingness of key actors to take the risk to try it. It must be noted that Akashi's tougher policy vis-à-vis the Khmer Rouge was not supported by the Secretary-General. It seems therefore relatively surprising that, after he finished his mission in Cambodia, Akashi was asked by Boutros-Ghali to become his special representative in the former Yugoslavia and lead UNPROFOR. Perhaps it was a sign of recognition that, in the end, Akashi had been right in his scepticism about the chances that the Khmer Rouge could be persuaded back into the process through quiet diplomacy.

The incentive to pressure the Khmer Rouge into cooperation disappeared the moment the implicit decision was taken in September 1992 to isolate them. Although it was never admitted publicly, this actually implied the acceptance that the Paris Peace Agreements were dead. Instead of seeing UNTAC's strategy as that of a departing train, as Stephen John Stedman has proposed, it was more based on keeping the Khmer Rouge passive, while maintaining the commitment of the other factions to the elections. In doing this, Akashi took far-reaching measures against the political intimidation of FUNCINPEC officials by the State of Cambodia, but saw himself forced to reduce the pressure as soon the Khmer Rouge started attacking UNTAC forces. Ultimately, however, the strategy based on the presumption that the Khmer Rouge would remain passive as long as UNTAC would keep up its impartiality turned out to be flawed. Further emboldened by UNTAC's demonstrations of weakness, the Khmer Rouge turned into an adversary that actively tried to prevent UNTAC from achieving its mission.

What was left of UNTAC's mission, now that the disarmament and demobilisation of the factions' armies had failed? As argued, organising elections, on time, had been the focus of the UN leadership from the start. The disarmament and demobilisation of the parties had been a first vital hurdle to take, but which was skipped once it turned out too difficult a challenge. The finishing line of elections provided UNTAC with a clear political purpose and strategic direction, which

has been identified by Mats Berdal and David Ucko as essential for any peacekeeping operation.[6] Whereas in the first months of the operation, Sanderson's cautiousness had not been beneficial for UNTAC's authority and effectiveness, the experienced military planner skilfully led the operation towards its final objective of elections. He retrospectively wrote: "The good fortune in Cambodia was in having a clear objective – the election. No matter how circumstances changed, the conduct and verification of the election stood out as the focal point of the mission and it was critical not to be diverted from it."[7] But was the political purpose to install a liberal democracy in Cambodia, or was it, more pragmatically, to achieve a presentable success? It was a combination of both. The Paris Peace Agreements stipulated that a legitimate democratic government was to be installed in Cambodia. But "success" was also connected to the central idea of the liberal peace theory that bringing democracy, however feeble at the outset, would form the best basis for peace.

Scholars have pointed out that in the run-up to the elections, UNTAC succeeded in organising itself and enhance its effectiveness. The closer civil-military cooperation within UNTAC, as pointed out by Brocades Zaalberg, or learning to operate as a multidimensional peacekeeping operation, as formulated by Morjé Howard, were certainly important in achieving the immensely complicated task of organising and securing the elections. Peou and Jennar have also been correct in pointing out that UNTAC's posture became more determined and dissuasive as the elections approached. However, it has not yet been sufficiently underlined that it was the political imperative of success of this vital UN experiment that led to a greater commitment, a sudden mobilisation of resources, and a willingness to take more risks to achieve the mission's final objective. Most crucially, UNTAC adopted a more liberal interpretation of its mandate, taking the notion of using force in defence of the mission very literally as elections were conducted in small safe areas under the protection of blue helmets, thereby showing what it may have done to UNTAC's credibility if applied earlier in the mission.

The main point, however, that scholars have largely overlooked in their assessment of UNTAC, is the importance of the security alliance UNTAC forged with the CPAF in defending the elections. By encouraging Hun Sen's army to conduct pre-emptive strikes on closing-in Khmer Rouge units, UNTAC effectively outsourced the offensive use of force to protect its mission. The fact that, by doing this, UNTAC violated the principle of impartiality has been largely ignored by scholars. Jeni Whalan, for example, has argued that UNTAC was able to win the confidence of the Cambodian military leaders by engaging with them through the Mixed Military Working Group, providing the operation with legitimacy and power.[8] But her analysis, that focusses on a power-legitimacy model, has left UNTAC's loss of impartiality unmentioned. Whereas the MMWG had indeed been designed as the primary tool in the hands of the force commander to coordinate the implementation of the peace agreements with the Cambodian factions and build trust among them, it has been demonstrated here that during the first months of the operation – both during UNAMIC and UNTAC – the MMWG was unable to provide the peacekeepers with much power because the Khmer Rouge thwarted the effectiveness of the meetings. As soon as the Khmer

6 Mats Berdal and David H. Ucko, "The Use of Force in UN Peacekeeping Operations: Problems and Prospects," *RUSI Journal,* 160, no.1 (February/March 2015): 7.

7 Sanderson, "The UNTAC Military Component," 124.

8 Jeni Whalan "The Local Legitimacy of Peacekeepers," *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 11, no. 3 (2017): 314; Whalan, *How Peace Operations Work,* 138.

Rouge left the meetings, the MMWG automatically became efficient, because it transformed into a platform of coordination between UNTAC and the cooperating factions for protecting the elections against the spoiler party.

The fact that some hostile actions by Khmer Rouge forces during the polling days were effectively taken care of by the CPAF, reveals that the security alliance was of vital importance to deter a Khmer Rouge disruption of the electoral process. This also meant that the risks that were involved with defending the elections against the Khmer Rouge were "transferred" to the troops of the State of Cambodia, to use the terminology of military sociologist Martin Shaw.[9] UNTAC certainly tried to uphold the pretence of impartiality, especially by pushing its efforts very far in finding Vietnamese forces. But the idea that a confrontation with the Khmer Rouge could be avoided turned out to be an illusion. Sanderson's decision to close the symbolic UNTAC representation in the Khmer Rouge fiefdom of Pailin signalled that the days of diplomatic peacekeeping were over. Peacekeepers are supposed to be soldiers without enemies, but in the spring of 1993, UNTAC peacekeepers defended the elections against an identified aggressor. This meant that UNTAC was no longer the "honest broker with no interests other than to assist the warring parties to obtain a peaceful resolution," as Duane Bratt described the purpose of impartiality.[10] The fact that UNTAC ceased being a neutral peacekeeping force was again confirmed when it became actively involved in strengthening the authority of the Cambodian provisional government by playing a central role in building up a new Cambodian army. Preoccupied with withdrawing from Cambodia as quickly as possible and consolidating the satisfactory outcome of the operation, UNTAC was no longer fostering compromise or a cease-fire between the parties, but acquiesced to the new Cambodian army's counterinsurgency operations against the Khmer Rouge, in order to consolidate its "success." UNTAC had changed from an election protection force into a stabilisation force.[11]

Despite the fact that scholars have largely subscribed to the argument that UNTAC respected the peacekeeping principles throughout its mission and that alternative courses of action would have amounted to Somalia-like peace enforcement and escalation, such a presentation of a two-option scenario provides an insufficient understanding of the decisions that ultimately led to the outcome of the operation. The incorrect claim that Loridon proposed a peace enforcement operation has served this narrative. It has also concealed the fact that Akashi and Sanderson held different visions, and the fact that the force commander blocked the special representative's plan for using more sticks than carrots, in favour of the policy preferred by his own government. The strict adherence to the peacekeeping principles was not the reason for UNTAC's ability to secure a "successful" outcome. On the contrary, the notions of impartiality and the use of force only in self-defence were stretched to the point of violation in order to save the mission in Cambodia and the credibility of UN peacekeeping itself. Although one could argue that UNTAC succeeded in some parts of its mandate, but failed in others, the concept of UN peacekeeping, as presented by the United Nations, was not successful in Cambodia. By studying the duration of peace after

9 Martin Shaw, *The new Western way of war: risk-transfer war and its crisis in Iraq* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008), 81.
10 Bratt, "Explaining peacekeeping performance," 64.
11 For a definition of stabilisation operations see: Cedric de Coning, "Is Stabilization the new normal? Implications of stabilization mandates for the use of force in UN peacekeeping operations," in *The Use of Force in UN Peacekeeping*, ed. Peter Nadin (London: Routledge, 2018), 90.

war, intervention and non-intervention, Virginia Page Fortna concluded that peacekeeping, and especially multidimensional peacekeeping, "works," although the Cambodia case causes some confusion. However, even if Cambodia would have remained completely stable after UNTAC had left, and had developed into a model liberal democracy, it would be incorrect to argue that peacekeeping had actually "worked" in Cambodia, because the UN had not played by the UN peacekeeping rules. Though many wanted to believe that the liberal internationalist ideal of building peace through impartial peacekeeping had worked in Cambodia, in reality, this turned out to be a delusion.

Whereas in the 1995 *Supplement to An Agenda for Peace*, Boutros-Ghali expressed scepticism about combining peacekeeping with elements of enforcement, the outcome of the Cambodian operation could only be achieved by doing just that. UNTAC's mandate was interpreted and applied according to the circumstances, and the theoretical line separating peacekeeping and peace enforcement moved along with it. The determining factor in this was the preparedness to take risks. When the risks involved in certain actions were considered too high, such as in deploying peacekeepers into the Khmer Rouge-controlled or contested zones, the limitations of the mandate were used as an excuse for inaction. But when the pressure increased to deliver a success, on Akashi personally and on the UN as a whole, the mandate was interpreted more flexibly. Eventually, UNTAC actually acted more in line with the ideas exposed in *An Agenda for Peace* than in the *Supplement*, as it operated without the consent of all parties, sacrificed its impartiality and used (indirect offensive) force to protect and achieve its mission.

In Cambodia, UN peacekeepers ventured into a grey area, just as they would do later in Somalia and the former Yugoslavia. John Ruggie's notion of the grey area is probably inherent to the complex nature of peacekeeping as a hybrid diplomatic-military activity, in which decision makers are constantly looking for a balance between diplomatic and military methods in fulfilling their mission. In Cambodia, a diplomatic approach was maintained with regard to disarmament and demobilisation, which failed to bring results and, if maintained, would not have allowed UNTAC to achieve the objective of the elections either. Eventually, the imperative of success made UNTAC switch to a more military approach. There was an enhanced commitment on all levels by both the UN Secretariat and troop contributing countries to accept more risk and use force. The political will to disarm the factions and maintain a cease-fire was much weaker than to achieve the elections. By comparison, political scientist James Gow has argued with regard to the situation in Yugoslavia that the lack of political will to use force was the central explanatory factor for the failure of UNPROFOR. He points out that diplomatic efforts remained unpersuasive because of categoric declarations from the outset that the peacekeepers would never use force. Gow demonstrates that, on the other hand, results only emerged after some form of coercion had been applied.[12]

Much of the contemporary debate among scholars and practitioners about UN peacekeeping revolves around the validity of the peacekeeping principles and the role and the utility of force in

12 James Gow, *Triumph of the Lack of Will: International Diplomacy and the Yugoslav War* (London: Hurst & Company, 1997), 140, 304.

UN peacekeeping operations.[13] The gap between the theory of peacekeeping and the realities of the changing nature of peacekeeping on the ground since the turn of the century receives much attention from analysts. At the beginning of the 2000s, the Security Council began to establish new missions, and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, under the leadership of Jean-Marie Guéhenno, sought to lay the conceptual groundwork that allowed peacekeeping operations to operate in difficult and non-permissive environments. The Report of the Panel on UN Peace Operations, known as the "Brahimi report" after the Algerian diplomat Lakhdar Brahimi who chaired the panel, published in 2000, as well as the "Capstone report" of 2008, proposed to reframe the notion of impartiality, noting the limitations of a passive response and the impossibility of equal treatment when one party violated the terms of a peace agreement.[14] Out of these introspective papers, as well as the "New Horizon" document published in 2009, grew the new concept of what has been termed "robust peacekeeping," aimed to deter spoilers from undermining a peace process. It is both a military and a political posture, in which firmness of the Security Council and troop-contributing countries is just as important as an operation's demonstration of willingness to respond decisively to attacks and obstructions to the implementation of its mandate.[15]

Partly as a consequence of these developments, scholars have observed that in the last two decades, UN peace operations have come to increasingly resemble stability operations or counterinsurgency interventions. The two concepts have been "converging on each other", according to Karsten Friis.[16] One of the characteristics of modern UN peace operations is that they are often deployed at the request and in support of a host state government, a situation in which it is impossible to remain impartial. Despite these changes, the UN continues to champion its original peacekeeping principles of consent, impartiality, and the non-use of force except in self-defence and to defend the mandate. Political scientist Peter Rudolf has pointed out that whereas the functions and forms of UN peacekeeping have changed profoundly at the operational

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13 Jan Angstrom and Isabelle Duyvesteyn, "War, what is it good for?," in *Modern War and the Utility of Force: Challenges, Methods, and Strategy*, eds. Jan Angstrom and Isabelle Duyvesteyn (New York: Routledge, 2010), 3.
John Karlsrud, *The UN at War: Peace Operations in a New Era* (Cham: Pallgrave Macmillan, 2018); Berdal and Ucko, "The United Nations and the Use of Force," 666; Stephen Ryan, "United Nations peacekeeping: A matter of principles," *International Peacekeeping* 7, no.1 (2000); Shashi Tharoor, "Should United Nations Peacekeeping Go 'Back to Basics'?," *Survival* 37, no.4 (1995); Mats Berdal, "What are the Limits to the Use of Force in UN Peacekeeping," in *United Nations Peace Operations in a Changing Global Order*, eds. Cedric de Coning and Mateja Peter (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019); Cedric de Coning, Chiyuki Aoi and John Karslrud, *UN Peacekeeping Doctrine in a New Era Adapting to Stabilisation, Protection and New Threats* (New York: Routledge, 2017); Mateja Peter, "Between Doctrine and Practice: The UN Peacekeeping Dilemma," *Global Governance* 21 (2015); Peter Nadin, ed., *The Use of Force in UN Peacekeeping* (New York: Routledge, 2018); Stephen Ryan, "United Nations peacekeeping: A matter of principles?," *International Peacekeeping* 7, no.1 (2000); Emily Paddon Rhoads, *Taking Sides in Peacekeeping: Impartiality and the Future of the United Nations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2016); Charles T. Hunt, "All necessary means to what ends? The unintended consequences of the 'robust turn' in UN peace operations," *International Peacekeeping* 24, no.1 (August 2016): 10; Thierry Tardy, "A critique of robust peacekeeping in contemporary peace operation," *International Peacekeeping* 18, no. 2 (2011); John Karlsrud, "The UN at war: examining the consequences of peace-enforcement mandates for the UN peacekeeping peacekeeping operations in the CAR, the DRC and Mali," *Third World Quarterly* 31, no.1 (2015): 41.

14 *Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations* (A/55/305 S/2000/809); *United Nations Peacekeeping Operations Principles and Guidelines*, March 2008 Peacekeeping Best Practices Section. Division of Policy, Evaluation and Training, DPKO.

15 Robust Peacekeeping Draft Concept Note, 2009, 3. Thierry Tardy, "Quel maintien de la paix « robuste » pour quel maintien de la paix efficace ? vers une approche réaliste de la robustesse," in *La paix par la force ?: Pour une approche réaliste du maintien de la paix « robuste »*, eds. Jocelyn Coulon and Alexandre Novosselloff (Outremont: Athéna éditions, 2011), 30.

16 Karsten Friis, "Peacekeeping and Counter-insurgency – Two of a Kind?", *International Peacekeeping* 17, no, 1 (2010): 49-66.

level, at "the declaratory level," the UN continues to adhere to its three basic principles.[17] But the UN's declarations are confusingly contradicting. The 2015 report of the Independent High-level Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO) called for the "flexible and progressive interpretation" of the peacekeeping principles, while recognizing that they will always play a key function in UN peacekeeping.[18]

The key difference between peacekeeping and counterinsurgency is indeed defined by the three peacekeeping principles: peacekeepers are impartial, whereas counterinsurgents take sides; peacekeepers work with the consent of all the parties, while counterinsurgents do not enjoy overall consent; peacekeepers use force only in self-defence and (theoretically) in defence of their mandate, whereas counterinsurgents obviously enjoy much wider possibilities of using force.[19] Indeed, impartiality has been described as the "oxygen," "lifeblood" and the "bedrock" of UN peacekeeping, because it refers to the position of the UN as an unbiased third party, which is a core value the organisation seeks to project.[20] Lise Howard therefore believes that negating the three peacekeeping rules is detrimental for the effectiveness of UN peacekeeping. She strongly makes the normative point that peacekeeping is not counterinsurgency, and that the two should remain strictly separated.[21] Counterinsurgency experts Thomas Mockaitis and John Mackinlay do not agree, and have pointed at the inherent similarities between peacekeeping and counterinsurgency.[22] They believe that, if these operations would have abandoned the pretence of adhering to the peacekeeping principles, they may actually have been more successful.[23] Neither Mockaitis nor Mackinlay have referred to UNTAC in their studies because the idea that this UN operation achieved its "success" through adherence to the peacekeeping principles did not seem to support their case. It is has been argued here, however, that UNTAC could not maintain its impartiality and also adopted the characteristics of a counterinsurgency operation. Howard contends that "peacekeepers are not war-fighters" and that "blurring the lines" between peacekeeping and counterinsurgency "is not a winning strategy."[24] But in Cambodia, the lines also became blurred, in order to save the "success" of the operation. This does not necessarily mean that abandoning the peacekeeping principles is a formula for success in any UN operation. It rather demonstrates that blanket statements on what works and what does not in peace operations are inaccurate and hold no historical or predictive value.

Both the arguments of Howard and the counterinsurgency advocates have merit. The key point that this study about the Cambodian peacekeeping operation unveils, is that the situation on the ground can change unexpectedly and very rapidly. Enjoying the consent and cooperation of all the parties in a peacekeeping operation is not a continued guarantee, but these values are often superficial and can very easily crumble. When a UN operation loses consent and cooperation from one of the belligerents, but the UN Security Council and the key member states involved

17 Peter Rudolf, "UN Peace Operations and the Use of Military Force," *Survival* 59, no. 3, (2017): 162.
18 Report of the Independent High-level Panel on Peace Operations, A/70/95–S/2015/446, (2015), 32.
19 Brocades Zaalberg, "Peacekeeping and Counterinsurgency," 82; Morjé Howard, *Power in UN peacekeeping*, 31.
20 Paddon Rhoads, *Taking Sides in Peacekeeping*, 1–2.
21 Lise Morjé Howard, "Peacekeeping is Not Counterinsurgency," *International Peacekeeping* 26, no. 5 (2019): 545–548.
22 John Mackinlay, the Insurgent Archipelago: From Mao to bin Laden (London: Hurst and Company, 2009) 66–70.
23 Thomas R. Mockaitis, "From counterinsurgency to peace enforcement: New names for old games?," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 10, no. 2 (1999): 40–57.
24 Lise Morjé Howard, "Peacekeeping is Not Counterinsurgency", *International Peacekeeping* 26, no. 5 (2019): 545–548.

remain determined to achieve the operations' objectives, the move towards a counterinsurgency strategy seems almost inevitable. Though UNTAC did not use offensive force against the Khmer Rouge itself – but subcontracted this more risky task to Hun Sen's forces – it did try to separate the Cambodian population from the insurgents through a hearts-and-minds approach and by allowing the population to go vote in areas that were under its protection. Moreover, with the elections approaching, UNTAC's troop contributing countries suddenly committed extra resources and demonstrated a stronger political determination to achieve an outcome that would save the enterprise in which so much money and credibility had been invested, by which they inexplicitly acknowledged that the operation needed more power to deter the opponent.

Berdal and Ucko have pointed out that the reason for the United Nations to continuously reconfirm its adherence to the traditional peacekeeping principles and emphasise the distinction between peacekeeping and peace enforcement, is highly political. It helps to meet the reservations of risk-averse troop-contributing countries. The concept of 'robust peacekeeping', serves to provide UN operations the possibility to use force, while retaining the traditional framework and principles of classical peacekeeping.[25] In other words, it is a way to keep member states willing to provide enough blue helmets, which are, incidentally, being supplied less and less by Western countries and for a large part by member states from the Global South. It has been demonstrated here that this dynamic was already at play during UNTAC, where the distinction between peacekeeping and peace enforcement was primarily aimed at securing the continued support from troop contributing countries and used as an excuse for adopting risk-averse strategies. This point has also been made by the Brazilian lieutenant general Carlos Alberto dos Santos Cruz, who, in 2017, published a very frank UN-sponsored report, in which he argued that mandates, rules of engagement and the peacekeeping principles are often used as a justification by commanders who are under pressure from their capitals to avoid risks.[26] In his report, the former force commander of UN missions in Haiti and the Democratic Republic of the Congo explicitly pleaded for a more robust posture in UN peacekeeping, emphasised the necessity to take risks, and provide an updated interpretation of the basic principles for peacekeeping.[27]

Lise Howard has interpreted the report by Santos Cruz as a call for UN peacekeeping to become more like counterinsurgency and resisted its conclusions.[28] Howard is right to warn for the problems peacekeeping operations will encounter if the UN pretends to uphold the peacekeeping principles, but cannot respect them in the field. However, interpreting Santos Cruz's report through the lens of a dichotomy between peacekeeping and counterinsurgency misses the key point the general actually tries to make, which is that one needs to acknowledge that peacekeeping operations, like any military mission, involve risks. This was exactly the argument UNTAC's Deputy Force Commander Michel Loridon made in Cambodia, but which was also

25 Mats Berdal and David H. Ucko, 'The Use of Force in UN Peacekeeping Operations: Problems and Prospects', *RUSI Journal* 160, no. 1 (February– March 2015) 11.

26 Carlos Alberto dos Santos Cruz, *Improving Security of United Nations Peacekeepers*, 19 December 2017, 12: https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3845635

27 Louise Riis Andersen, "The HIPPO in the room: the pragmatic push-back from the UN peace bureaucracy against the militarization of UN peacekeeping," *International Affairs* 94, no. 2 (2018): 359; Richard Gowan, "Fighting Words: The Cruz Report Restores a Military Voice to Peacekeeping Debates," *IPI Global Observatory*, 19 February 2018; Rick Gladstone, "U.N. Peacekeepers Must 'Not Fear to Use Force' to Foil Attacks, Report Says," *The New York Times*, 22 January 2018.

28 Morjé Howard, "Peacekeeping is not Counterinsurgency," 546.

readily interpreted as a plea for counterinsurgency or peace enforcement. In the first sentence of his report, Santos Cruz writes: "Peacekeeping is a risky activity. A certain number of casualties may occur even if all necessary preventive measures are taken." As Loridon had done, Santos Cruz urges troop contributing countries to "change their mindset, take risks and show a willingness." Also; Santos Cruz emphasises the importance of peacekeepers showing "determination" in fulfilling their mandate and deterring spoilers from continuing their disruptive campaigns. Santos Cruz's affirmation that a strong posture will gain respect and reduce casualties, strongly resembles Loridon's "shoot at us if you dare" mentality.[29] This analogy shows that the issue of "risk" should not be overlooked in the study of peacekeeping operations because it is such an important factor that informs decision making processes, not only in UN peacekeeping operations, but also more broadly in the realm of foreign interventions and international security issues as has been argued by Yaacov Vertzberger.[30]

Robust peacekeeping has often been presented as a response to the inability of UN operations in Bosnia in 1992–1995 and Rwanda in 1994 to prevent massive killing from occurring on their watch. However, this study reveals that the concept of robust peacekeeping has been applied *avant la lettre* in Cambodia. We have seen that UNTAC succeeded in its final objective of organising elections because it turned itself into an increasingly robust peacekeeping force. The operation clearly signalled its intent to implement its mandate and its determination to withstand attempts to disrupt the elections. If UNTAC would have demonstrated the same mentality during the phase of disarmament, a more sustainable peace may have been achieved in Cambodia. However, UNTAC considered itself – and probably was – insufficiently robust to defend the elections against the Khmer Rouge. It therefore relied on the assistance from the Khmer Rouge's main adversary, Hun Sen's State of Cambodia, to protect the operation's final objective. This means that in order to secure its impartiality, a UN peacekeeping operation needs to be sufficiently robust itself, so it can avoid relying too heavily on one of the parties, and in most cases on government authority.

Answering the normative question what kind of activity UN peacekeeping should be goes beyond the scope of a historical study. It can only attempt to make a contribution to the discussion by providing a context of one of the largest, though understudied, peacekeeping operations in the history of the United Nations. The former head of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, Jean-Marie Guéhenno, indicated in his memoirs about his time in office that, as an operator in charge of UN peacekeeping operations, he found it useful to read history books because it allowed him to think with "the fraternal companionship of other actors before me who had had to deal with confusion, grapple with the unknown, and yet had made decisions."[31] Hopefully, the context of the operation in Cambodia can contribute to a better understanding of current debates about UN peacekeeping and its challenges.

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29 Santos Cruz, *Improving Security,* 1, 11, 12.

30 Yaacov Y.I. Vertzberger, *Risk taking and Decisionmaking: Foreign Military Intervention Decisions* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 400.

31 Jean-Marie Guéhenno, *The Fog of Peace: A Memoir of International Peacekeeping in the 21st Century* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2015), xvi.