

The Test of Transition

The UN Administration of Cambodia (1992-1993)



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¹ Figure 1: NGO car crossing a damaged bridge in Pursat Province, April 1993 [author's family photos]

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Dedicated to my grandfather, 'Kong' Chunn Eang,
whose life stands as a testament to love of family.

អរគុណសំរាប់អ្វីៗទាំងអស់

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Introduction

On the 26th of October 1992, a memorandum sent by a slightly panicked Eduardo Vetere, Chief of Public Security of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia, arrived in the United Nations Headquarters building in Phnom Penh. On the other side of the city, a meeting was about to begin between representatives of three of Cambodia's most prominent political parties, whereas a few months before each party was an armed faction in a decades-long conflict. It was not the content of the meeting that worried Vetere, which was to discuss with the parties the application of an interim penal code for Cambodia, but that the room the meeting was to be held in did not meet a standard of "hospitality" the party representatives expected. The Director of Administration, Hocine Medili of Algeria—an experienced administrator of previous peacekeeping operations in Namibia and veteran diplomatic servant of the United Nations since the 1970s—handwrote a response in the margins of memorandum to an anxious Vetere: "we can deal with the question of 'hospitality' for these meetings and conferences by purchasing coffee/tea making equipment...and buy the perishables (coffee, tea, cookies) from the market."² This conflict resolution per cookies and tea in some ways provides a useful analogy for a surface understanding of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC); rushed UN administrators

² Eduardo Vetere and Hocine Medili, "Interoffice Memorandum: Training Sessions" (UNARMS, October 26, 1992), S-0794-0028-03 (UNTAC - 1/22.1. - Civil Administration - Public Security), United Nations Archive Geneva; Eduardo Vetere, "Interoffice Memorandum: Use of the Meeting Room at UNTAC Headquarters" (UNARMS, October 26, 1992), S-0794-0028-03 (UNTAC - 1/22.1. - Civil Administration - Public Security), United Nations Archive Geneva.

looked to accommodate Cambodia's factions, seemingly distracted from a larger discussion of how Cambodia could truly transition from a period of tumult to a lasting and meaningful peace.

Yet, it is too easy to fall into the trap of polemicizing against UN missions, especially with the calamities of Rwanda (1994) and Srebrenica (1995) that demonstrate a certain incompetency of the UN in protecting human rights or the tenets of its Charter. Vetere and Medili, and their struggle to get various conference rooms stocked with confectionery, was a miniscule moment in the day-to-day operations of the vast administrative machinery that was UNTAC. In essence, the UN administration of Cambodia from February 1992 to September 1993, was a remarkable period that ushered in a definitive end to the conflict and internal strife that had plagued much of Cambodia's history in the preceding decades. The Authority held administrative control of Cambodia by the United Nations Security Council for the purpose of rebuilding governmental institutions, the repatriation of refugees, and translating a tenuous cease-fire between armed factions into a lasting democratic order with fair and free elections.

The task that lay before UN administrators was immense. To bring a permanent peace settlement to Cambodia, a country that had experienced over two decades of conflict since the capitulation of its post-independence government in 1970. In between 1970 and 1991, Cambodians had witnessed a brutal civil war, a genocide that decimated nearly a third of the country's population, foreign occupation, several unstable regime changes, and continuous insurgency from armed factions. Cambodian society was fractured, and its governmental institutions were shells of bureaucracy that failed to provide basic services. The colossal task required a robust and enhanced UN presence for a transition period to be successful and without bloodshed. Thus, UNTAC was a precedent-setting intervention by the United Nations; as the Organization temporarily took full

administrative control of the country as a protectorate, initiating one of the largest peacekeeping and international state-building projects in modern history.

In February 1992, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted “Resolution 745”, which officially established UNTAC, where the Authority would assume control of governmental affairs of Cambodia and facilitate elections in the summer of 1993. From February 1992 to September 1993, the UN mission in Cambodia sought to translate the tenuous peace agreement into a lasting political settlement by restoring a civil government through temporary direct control. For an eighteen-month period the UN controlled nearly all aspects of governmental affairs in Cambodia, including foreign affairs, national defense, finance, public security, and even controlled information dissemination through its own radio station.³ Other aspects of UNTAC fell along the lines of traditional UN involvement: facilitating the disarmament and demobilization of Cambodia’s warring factions, confiscating weapons and military supplies, repatriating and resettling over 300,000 refugees, assisting in landmine clearance, and rehabilitating essential infrastructure to assist in economic reconstruction and development. The operation footprint was unprecedentedly large with over 22,000 UN personnel entering the country by the summer of 1992: 15,900 military personnel and peacekeepers to uphold the ceasefire, 3,400 civilian police to maintain the rule of law, and 2,000 civilian administrators to serve as the temporary bureaucracy

³ Jean E. Krasno, ed., *The United Nations: Confronting the Challenges of a Global Society* (Boulder, Colo: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004), 23. Jean E. Krasno, *The United Nations: Confronting the Challenges of a Global Society* (Viva Books, 2005), 23.

for the protectorate. By 1993, the final price tag of the mission was over \$1.6 billion; for context, the regular UN budget for 1991 was just \$2.3 billion.

This paper seeks to investigate the administrative logic behind UNTAC and the approaches of its administrators, and to place UNTAC within a wider history of direct administration projects by the United Nations as they evolved throughout the post-war period. How successful was ‘direct administration’ as a codified form of intervention when it was translated into a system of governance during Cambodia’s post-genocide reconstruction? Do instances where UNTAC faltered in its mandate represent the shortcomings of the administration and the logic behind direct administration as developed during previous mandates? Or perhaps this signified the rejection by Cambodian political leaders of the human rights rhetoric that guided the UN’s presence in Cambodia?

UNTAC was a significant moment in not only the history of Cambodia, but also a precedent-setting moment in the history of international intervention, manifested in the creation of the largest multinational protectorate in modern history. Yet, the extent to which UNTAC brought peace to Cambodia is debatable. Certainly, it can be credited with its successes in repatriation, landmine clearance, and peacekeeping, but the whether the mission brought a lasting democratic order to Cambodia remains in question. Hun Sen, the prime minister voted into office during the UNTAC-ran 1993 elections, remains in power, marking him as the longest-serving prime minister

in the world and raising questions about whether UNTAC was able to successfully instill democratic values over the course of its eighteen-month administration of the country.⁴

The existing scholarship on UNTAC has been relatively sparse. Certain prominent topics of Cambodian modern history such as its independence from France in the immediate post-WWII period, the Cambodian Civil War, the Khmer Rouge regime, and the Third Indochina War; have generated much historical scholarship than any discussion on the UN administration of Cambodia.⁵ Of the major scholars of modern Cambodian history, David Chandler has covered the most ground towards offering an evaluation on the UNTAC period. Chandler's *History of Cambodia* (2019), a survey monograph of Cambodia's modern history, argues that the shortcomings of the UN administration can be traced to the administrative failings of the Vietnamese occupation of the country from 1979 to 1989 under the puppet state People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK). Chandler further contends that some of the limitations of the UN administration can be also connected to continued violence in northwestern Cambodia due to remnants of Khmer Rouge guerillas.⁶ While there are merits to Chandler's arguments, the citing of pre-UNTAC conditions and the inheritances acquired from previous regimes fails to include the structural limitations that may have inhibited the UN administration and does not include an examination of its unintended consequences. Of the scholars that partly address these issues, Michael Doyle's argument

⁴ Sebastian Strangio, *Cambodia: From Pol Pot to Hun Sen and Beyond*, Paperback edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), 34.

⁵ See also: David P. Chandler, *A History of Cambodia*, 4th ed (Boulder, Colo: Westview Press, 2008); Odd Arne Westad and Sophie Quinn-Judge, *The Third Indochina War: Conflict between China, Vietnam and Cambodia, 1972-79*, Cold War History 11 (London: Routledge, 2006).

⁶ Chandler, *A History of Cambodia*, 243.

approaches the ability of the UN to effectively insulate state civil structures from Cambodia's nascent post-war political parties, such as the Cambodian People's Party CPP and FUNCINPEC, headed by king Norodom Sihanouk. Yet, Doyle's conclusions also represent an emergent misreading of UNTAC's effectiveness in the surrounding scholarship.⁷ His characterization of Cambodia's 1993 elections as "the politically tolerable substitute for the inability of factions to reconcile their conflicts" represents a misguided, near-utopian mentality that frustrates needed critical evaluation of the administration.

During UNTAC, Cambodia was placed under the control of a new regime nothing like its post-colonial predecessors; it was it an administration of international civil servants guided by principles of Human Rights and democracy. The UN mission in Cambodia was a significant ideological and administrative shift in how Cambodia was to be governed, though the extent to which it had completed its objectives is up for debate and how the Cambodian people received such governance remains to be fully explored.

To address why such an unprecedented mission was met with limited success points to the flaws in UNTAC's governance; a closer look at their actions hints at their miscalculated optimism and an underestimation by UN officials of the challenges Cambodia posed. This paper seeks to trace that flawed approach, not just through the origins of UNTAC, but also through the UN's

⁷ Trevor Findlay, *Cambodia: The Legacy and Lessons of UNTAC*, SIPRI Research Report, no. 9 (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Ramses Amer, *Peace-Keeping in a Peace Process: The Case of Cambodia*, Research Report / Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University 40 (Uppsala: Uppsala Univ, 1995).

relationship to the world in the preceding decades. Specifically, how important operational capacities and administrative practices that unfolded in the first few decades of the UN's existence made UNTAC and its miscalculations possible. Furthermore, this paper seeks to show how these conditions materialized only at the very end of the Cold War, where a possible 'UN renaissance' in a mission like UNTAC can occur with the triumph of the liberal international order. This paper seeks to understand the logic behind creating a role for the UN in running administrative structures to aid transition from intranational divide and conflict to a regularized and self-determined. Within this history, UNTAC can be seen as a huge and uncertain experiment for a re-energized UN that had been long suppressed in its mission, making Cambodia its laboratory for executing that mission, but with only mixed results.

When UNTAC arrived in Cambodia, it was immediately beset with serious problems both logistical and political in nature. While the administration was able to eventually surmount its initial problems of the procurement of equipment and the of lack manpower, it faced a largely uncooperative political environment, where Cambodia's factions—especially the 'State of Cambodia' (SoC)—sought to maintain control of the country's pre-existing administrative structures at the expense of the ceasefire and the integrity of the UN-run elections. However, the largest obstacle the UN Authority faced throughout all its components (electoral, administrative, and military), were contradictions and impossibilities of its own mandate. The UN engaged in governance without full control over state structures, reform without authority, and the facilitation of elections in which the participating parties constantly sought to undermine the importation of democracy. These were the challenges that faced both the electoral and administrative components of the UN Authority. The framers of the Paris Agreement, who advanced a reinvigorated vision

for a post-Cold War UN, gave unwitting UN administrators a mandate in Cambodia that severely underestimated and misunderstood the country's political landscape and its attendant obstacles.

The impetus for revisiting the history of UNTAC comes from the vast amount of archival literature only recently made available since 2019, primarily found at the United Nations Archive in both New York City and Geneva, Switzerland. None of the existing scholarship on UNTAC utilizes this vast source base, allowing this paper to reconstruct an in-depth exploration of how the Administration evolved over the course of its time in Cambodia.

The UN Archives in New York and Geneva, Switzerland together contain the entirety of official papers produced during the UN Civil Administration's time in Cambodia, from the national to provincial levels that detail internal evaluations, expectations, and reactions to the mission's progress and performance. From the archives in Geneva, papers allow for the tracing of UNTAC's civil administrative support, seen in the UN assumption of control over Cambodia's existing governmental institutions as it attempted to create a politically neutral environment conducive to elections. The UN archive in New York details electoral support papers, seen in the drafting and enforcement of electoral law, the suppression of political violence, the regulation of political parties, and ultimately, the running of general elections in May 1993.

Specific archival items include two series, S-0794-0028 (Civil Administration – Geneva Archive) and S-0794-0030 (Electoral – New York Archive). Each series contains documents from

the offices of their respective directors⁸ that were received by the office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG) Yasushi Akashi. In the margins of many documents within both series, we find the handwritten responses, annotations, and highlighting by Special Representative Akashi, the UN's top administrator in Cambodia. These chronological folders illuminate the day-to-day progress of the Administration, as they hold internal memorandums, monthly activity reports, minutes of meetings with various administrative officials, military personnel, and Cambodia's factions. Documents in Khmer have been translated by the author. In essence, these archival sources represent what was brought to the attention of UNTAC's senior staff, what they knew, how they responded, and the ways in which they measured their own progress.

While much of this work is dependent on UNTAC's archival sources, they are supplemented by oral history interviews conducted by the author,⁹ interviews given by UNTAC's administrators during the 1990s, Cambodian and international periodicals—heavily featuring the *Phnom Penh Post*, and documents produced by the United Nations Secretariat and Security Council sourced from the United Nation's digital collections.

⁸ Reginald Austin was the Chief Electoral Officer of the Electoral Component and Gérard Porcell was the Director of the Civil Administration Component.

⁹ Three interviews conducted by the author were used in this project. Two interviews were conducted in Khmer with two Cambodian individuals from Battambang Province and Pursat Province. The third interview was with a United Nations Volunteer (UNV) from the United Kingdom. All interviews were conducted in person during the author's trip to Cambodia. By no means representative of the Cambodian population or the UN presence in the country, these interviews are intended to add color and supplement this paper's mainly top-down approach.

The first chapter, through the lens of UNTAC's mandate, outlines the institutional history of UN direct administration in the 1960s as it evolved into 'comprehensive peacekeeping' approach that emerged at the beginning of the 1990s. Past iterations of UNTAC such as an administration in West New Guinea in 1962 were where some of the habits of administration that followed the UN into Cambodia were formed. Within this chapter, a brief outline of Cambodian history is included to show how the country evolved into a potential subject for UN intervention. UNTAC's mandate was ultimately the product of how the Organization sought to renew itself at the close of the Cold War, where direct administration interventions evolved into multi-dimensional peacekeeping operations.

The second chapter is a chronological survey of the UN Civil Administration and its related components that demonstrates how the dissipation of the initial jovial mood of the UN arrival represented the Administration's shifted expectations for its mission. UNTAC gradually moved away from truly 'comprehensive' mission to one that only sought to meet the mandate's minimum requirement: running of elections in the summer of 1993. It is within that shift of expectations that the Civil Administration compromised the realization of UNTAC's human rights mission, where the timely and uncomplicated withdrawal from Cambodia became the Authority's main objective.

The final chapter seeks to outline the electoral planning process and its significant challenges as emblematic of the 'withdrawal' mentality that took hold of the Administration in early 1993. As the Administration focused its efforts on the electoral process, its improvisational approach exacerbated ethnic tensions within the country to the detriment of the election's security and integrity. Additionally, the piecemeal approach to the legal questions surrounding enfranchisement, as the Administration defined the boundaries of the Cambodian electorate,

contributed to the fragility of the democratic norms it was trying to install and threatened the mission's very presence in Cambodia. The chapter closes on May elections, where even in their success, the limits and habits of UN administration are further revealed.

Chapter 1: The Origins of UNTAC's Charter

“National boundaries are blurred by advanced communications and global commerce, and by the decisions of States to yield some sovereign prerogatives to larger, common political associations”.

Boutros Boutros-Ghali, *An Agenda for Peace* (1992)¹⁰

In July 1989, amid the ornate nineteenth-century buildings of Paris' 16th arrondissement, the first proceedings of the Paris International Conference on Cambodia began in one of the grand conference rooms of the Hôtel Majestic. The Majestic was a venue already familiar with Indochinese peace negotiations where just sixteen years prior the “Agreement on Ending the War and Restoring Peace in Viet Nam” was signed, effectively ending American involvement in Vietnam. However, the parallels between the 1973 Paris Peace Accords and the “Comprehensive Cambodia Peace Agreements” end at both being Southeast Asian peace treaties signed in the same Parisian luxury hotel. Where the former ended Cold War-era foreign military incursion in Vietnam, the latter called for an unprecedented multinational, humanitarian, and administrative intervention in Cambodia.

During the Paris peace negotiations in 1989, delegates representing Cambodian factions requested—in the name of democracy and human rights—a comprehensive and multilayered international operation that would finally bring peace to the country. The opening speech by Prince Norodom Sihanouk, the former king of Cambodia turned leader of Cambodian National Resistance

¹⁰ Boutros Boutros-Ghali, *An Agenda for Peace*, 1995, 2nd ed., with the new supplement and related UN documents (New York: United Nations, 1995).

(CNR), demonstrated the factions' nascent appetite for a large-scale international peacekeeping presence and "international control mechanisms" (ICM) in any post-agreement transition period. In his address, Sihanouk suggested that any agreement needed to "organize general elections under the control of the ICM, allowing the Cambodian people, the true and only master of our country, to exercise freely its right to self-determination and its right to endow to Cambodia with a suitable regime."¹¹ Reminding the delegates of the horrors of regimes past when five of his children and fourteen of his grandchildren were murdered under the Pol Pot government, the Prince committed to the principles of human rights for not only the transitional period but for the Cambodian government that would follow elections.¹² His words outlined the basic vision for the transitional period, where Cambodia—with the help of the international community—would be transformed into a human rights-respecting democracy after decades of tumult.

Sihanouk's call for an "international control mechanism" to oversee the country's unification and elections were the embryonic stages of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia. Sihanouk and the other Cambodian parties all agreed that there should be monitoring authority of the country's interim government.¹³ However, his July speech was given over two years before the official signing of the "Comprehensive Cambodia Peace Agreements" in the

¹¹ Norodom Sihanouk, "Speech by Norodom Sihanouk of Cambodia to the Paris International Conference on Cambodia: Paris 30 July 1989," in *Cambodia--the 1989 Paris Peace Conference: Background Analysis and Documents*, ed. Amitav Acharya, Pierre Lizée, and Sorpong Peou (Paris Peace Conference, Millwood, N.Y: Kraus International Publications, 1991), 3–9.

¹² Sihanouk, 5.

¹³ Michael W. Doyle, *UN Peacekeeping in Cambodia: UNTAC's Civil Mandate* / (Boulder, Colo. : Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1995), 34.

autumn of 1991. By the conclusion of the first rounds of negotiations in August, there were still no major proposals for an enhanced United Nations role in the Cambodian peace process.¹⁴ Yet, between the summer of 1989 and the autumn of 1991, after continuous negotiations and deadlock over the exact nature of an “interim authority,” the contours of UNTAC started to emerge.¹⁵ The largest step towards a UN-led caretaker administration came not from the Cambodian factions but from the United Nations itself when the Security Council proposed its own framework for a UN trusteeship-like authority. Reiterating Sihanouk’s 1989 overtures for free elections and human rights, the Security Council’s “Framework Document” called for the Cambodian factions to “delegate to the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) all powers

¹⁴ None of the other faction delegates, including Sihanouk’s party, proposed language that referred to any international transitional authority being connected to the United Nations, except in terms of peacekeeping. In terms of administrative control during the transition period, there was an emergent consensus in August 1989 that the political factions would enter a “provisional *quadripartite*” government that would oversee elections. See: “Letter Dated 19 August 1989 from Mr. Son Sann’s Delegation to the Secretariat: (CPC/89/CA/L.2, Issued 21 August 1989),” in *Cambodia—the 1989 Paris Peace Conference: Background Analysis and Documents*; Son Sann, “Declaration de Son Excellence Son Sann, President Du FNLPK À La 6ème Séance de La Commission Ad Hoc,” in *Cambodia—the 1989 Paris Peace Conference: Background Analysis and Documents*; “Letter From Mr. Hun Sen’s Delegation to the Secretariat. Counter Proposals to the Preliminary Draft Protocol (18H),” in *Cambodia—the 1989 Paris Peace Conference: Background Analysis and Documents*.

¹⁵ In December 1989, a proposal by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to the Cambodian parties was a breakthrough in the peace negotiations held in Jakarta, Indonesia. As an alternative to any tenuous power sharing agreement between the Cambodian factions, the Australian peace plan explicitly called for a United Nations trusteeship-like administration of Cambodia to prepare the country for general elections. The tentative name for the UN authority was the “United Nations Cambodia Task Force (UNCTAF)” with many of the same components (administrative, electoral, and military) UNTAC would eventually have. The United Nations Security Council would propose its “Framework Document” for the Cambodian peace process in response to the *Australian Peace Proposal*. See: Steven Erlanger, “Diplomats Set Up Drive in Cambodia,” *New York Times*, December 17, 1989, Sunday edition; *Cambodia: An Australian Peace Proposal. Working Papers Prepared for the Informal Meeting on Cambodia, Jakarta, 26-28 February 1990* (Canberra: published for the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade by the Australian Government Publishing Service, 1990); Steven Ratner, “The Cambodian Settlement Agreements,” in *Cambodia: Change and Continuity in Contemporary Politics*, ed. Sorpong Peou (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2018), 7.

necessary to ensure the implementation of the comprehensive agreement, including those relating to the conduct of free and fair elections and the relevant aspects of the administration of Cambodia.”¹⁶ Thus, the “international control mechanism” proposed by Sihanouk took its final form as a temporary UN administration of the country, where Cambodia’s existing state structures were eventually required by international law to cede authority to representatives of the UN Secretary-General. Expanding on the Security Council’s framework, the Agreement on a Comprehensive Political Settlement of the Cambodian Conflict was ultimately signed by all parties at the Hôtel Majestic on the October 23, 1991.¹⁷ In that moment, the UN had received its mandate to govern Cambodia.

This brief outline of the immediate origins of the UN’s enhanced role in the peace process is useful in painting UNTAC’s mandate as the product of strenuous compromise between the country’s factional forces and their benevolent mediators, comprised of Cambodia’s Southeast Asian neighbors, concerned superpowers, and a compassionate international community.¹⁸ In the opening sessions of negotiations in 1989 before the proposal for a UN administration, all the

¹⁶ This document is a letter adopted unanimously by the Security Council after several fact-finding missions sent by the UN Secretariat in the previous year. It is the first official mention of “UNTAC” in any document during the peace negotiations. See: “Letter Dated 30 August 1990 from the Permanent Representatives of China, France, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America to the United Nations Addressed to the Secretary-General.” (Dag Hammarskjöld Library, August 31, 1990), A/45/472 S/21689, United Nations Digital Library.

¹⁷ Michael W. Doyle, Ian Johnstone, and Robert C. Orr, eds., *Keeping the Peace: Multidimensional UN Operations in Cambodia and El Salvador* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 34.

¹⁸ This narrative in recent retrospective literature is best displayed in Son Soubert’s chapter “The 1991 Paris Peace Agreement: a KPRLF perspective” in Pou Sothirak’s edited volume. Soubert was an advisor to Prince Norodom Sihanouk and member of Khmer People National Liberation Front (KPRLF), part of the Cambodian National Resistance. See: Pou Sothirak, Geoff Wade, and Mark Hong, eds., *Cambodia : Progress and Challenges since 1991* (Singapore : Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2012), <http://catdir.loc.gov/catdir/toc/fy13pdf02/2012330188.html>.

factions—including Sihanouk—envisioned a temporary power-sharing agreement but none of the parties could agree on its exact composition.¹⁹ UNTAC seemed like the natural alternative to a tenuous quadripartite government that would have included Khmer Rouge participation to the distaste of international human rights-watchers and, more importantly, Cambodians.

Beyond it being a political compromise, the creation of the UN mandate for Cambodia has a much longer history. Tracing the origins of UNTAC's mandate just to the negotiations between 1989 and 1991 ignores the unprecedented shift in the UN methodology of peacekeeping and 'direct administration' the mission represented. These shifts were indicative of much larger changes in how the UN understood its role in the world in the twilight of the Cold War and the period immediately after. The UN administration of Cambodia was seen not only by the negotiators in Paris but also the UN itself as the 'natural' or the only viable solution to a transitional government. Where did this institutional confidence come from? To understand where, UNTAC's mandate must be viewed not as the result of diplomatic compromise, but as the newest, ambitious, and experimental version of 'direct administration' as a pre-existing instrument in the UN's intervention toolbox. Thus, the Comprehensive Settlement's mandate for a temporary UN administration serves as a window into its own genealogy of 'direct administration' beginning in

¹⁹ One revealing proposal by the KPNLF for an interim "National Union Government of Cambodia" (NUGC) outlined a complex plan for a "quadripartite Directory, three quadripartite collegial ministries and twelve non-collegial ministries" to be split between the parties. It was immediately rejected by two other parties. See: Amitav Acharya, Pierre Lizée, and Sorpong Peou, eds., "Khmer People's Liberation Front Paris Conference on Cambodia: Protocol Concerning the Establishment of a Provisional Quadripartite Authority (Preliminary Draft)," in *Cambodia—the 1989 Paris Peace Conference: Background Analysis and Documents* (Paris Peace Conference, Millwood, N.Y: Kraus International Publications, 1991), 384–96.

the 1960s where the institutional knowledge and practice first developed that eventually followed the UN to Cambodia.

UNTEA and Origins of UN Direct Administration (1962–1963)

The primary architecture of UNTAC's mandate in the Comprehensive Settlement was formed from the United Nations Security Council's "Framework Document". The document's authorship did not only consist of the diplomats of the Permanent Five but—more significantly—officials, investigators, and bureaucrats of the UN Secretariat. In addition to the UN fact-finding missions to Cambodia at the beginning of 1990, a significant basis of New York's vision of an enhanced temporary UN administration drew from the Organization's internal familiarity of how previous UN protectorates were framed in the past. The practice of temporary 'direct administration' as part of the wider toolbox of intervention was a tenured approach since the 1960s, the first venture being the United Nations Temporary Executive Authority (UNTEA) of West New Guinea between October 1962 to May 1963. By establishing a clear lineage of approach between UNTEA and UNTAC, as seen in the significant similarities present in both of their charters, demonstrates how the transitional authority in Cambodia was following institutional habits formed almost thirty years prior. Beyond their structural resemblances, the parallels between both missions reveal the post-colonial roots of UN 'direct administration' of Cambodia, where the conventions of international organization governance of a territory formed in the 1960s carried into the 1990s

when the Organization not only authored its own Cambodian mandate, but when it administrated Cambodia.

The UN Temporary Executive Authority of West New Guinea was created as an interim protectorate that took over the Dutch colonial administration of the territory as part of a larger transfer of power to the recently independent Republic of Indonesia between 1962 and 1963. Unlike any previous UN mission, UNTEA was a novel and ambitious experiment, and the first instance where UN officials administered a territory under the direct responsibility of the Secretary General, U Thant of Burma.²⁰ While being a much overlooked undertaking by the Organization, which took place in the shadow of the UN's involvement in the Congo in the 1960s that drew the world's attention, it remained the first instance of the distinctive and innovative tool of 'direct administration' as a means of intervention.²¹ Unlike UN trusteeships, where the governance of a territory was conducted by another state, which was the institutional successor to the League of Nations Mandatory system, UN protectorates involved the Organization itself assuming direct administrative control of the territory. Until UNTEA, the last time an international organization governed a territory was when the League of Nations occupied the Saar Basin in Germany in 1920.²²

²⁰ Norrie MacQueen and Norrie MacQueen, *The United Nations, Peace Operations and the Cold War*, 2nd ed, Seminar Studies in History (New York: Pearson Longman, 2011), 63.

²¹ U Thant's memoirs only give anecdotal reference to the West New Guinea operation.

²² Margot L. Tudor, "Blue Helmet Bureaucrats: UN Peacekeeping Missions and the Formation of the Post-Colonial International Order, 1956-1971," *PQDT - Global* (Ph.D., England, The University of Manchester (United Kingdom), 2020), 127, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global (2652592094), <http://ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/blue-helmet-bureaucrats-un-peacekeeping-missions/docview/2652592094/se-2?accountid=10226>.

In the case of UNTEA's operation and in terms of its mandate—bilaterally created by Indonesia and the Netherlands—it was a success that bolstered a mentality of confidence within UN circles. The Organization, during UNTEA, proved to itself and to the world that it could successfully govern a territory with its politically appointed technocrats and diplomats. What encapsulates this self-congratulatory moment is a speech made by the UNTEA mission's head administrator, Djalal Abdoh of Iran, at the end of the UN's tenure in West New Guinea: “[this] administration was indeed an epoch-making precedent,” announcing that the UN presence in the territory successfully “[prepared] the local population psychologically for the political changes that were taking place.”²³ Thus, long before the 1989 negotiations in Paris, the UN had convinced itself that it was qualified to govern a territory.

Structurally, UNTAC and its Papuan precursor shared a great deal of similarities. For example, the Comprehensive Political Settlement and the 1962 UN-mediated treaty between Indonesia and the Netherlands gave their UN administrators significant autonomy under the purview of the Secretary-General. The agreements provided UNTAC's “Special Representative of the Secretary-General” (SRSG) and UNTEA's United Nations Administrator, the civilian heads of their respective missions, with complete discretion over how each authority sought to complete their mandates.²⁴ In terms of local participation in UN administrations' executive decision making,

²³ Djalal Abdoh, “Address by the United Nations Administrator of West Irian (West New Guinea), Djalal Abdoh” (UNARMS, April 29, 1963), S-0876-0001-07-00001 (Dr. Djalal Abdoh), United Nations Archive New York, <https://search.archives.un.org/dr-djalal-abdoh-2>.

²⁴ Republic of Indonesia and Netherlands, “Agreement (with Annex) Concerning West New Guinea (West Irian). Signed at the Headquarters of the United Nations, New York, on 15 August 1962” (United Nations Treaty Collection, August 15, 1962), No. 6311, United Nations Treaty Collection Depository; United Nations, “Agreement

the bilateral treaty establishing UNTEA gave little-to-no attention to the Papua population, only inviting Javanese representatives from the government in Jakarta—over 3,000 kilometers away—to observe the transition.²⁵ For UNTAC, its mandate made more of an effort to include Cambodians during its temporary government, however this gesture was mainly cosmetic. The Paris Agreement created an interim body, the Supreme National Council (SNC), to represent the unified interests of Cambodia’s political factions as the “unique legitimate body and source of authority in Cambodia in which...national sovereignty and unity are enshrined.”²⁶ Yet, according to the mandate the SNC only held an advisory role where all final decisions were made by the SRSG, who only reported to the Secretary-General.

These evident parallels between the organizational structures of UNTAC and its predecessor’s mandates envisioned speak to a continuity of approach in ‘direct administration’ interventions conducted by the UN. The operational assumptions were the same: the neutrality of the UN allowed it effectively govern a territory between the administrations of two different regimes. Behind the perceived ‘neutrality’ of a UN authority in West New Guinea and later in Cambodia was the expectation that the administrations would not engage in serious or controversial political debate, where local voices were marginalized or quarantined from the transitional administrations’ decision-making apparatus. The logic behind this approach can be

on a Comprehensive Political Settlement of the Cambodia Conflict” (UN Department of Public Information, October 23, 1991), United States Institute of Peace: Peace Agreements Digital Collection, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2000/02/peace-agreements-cambodia>.

²⁵ Republic of Indonesia and Netherlands, “Agreement (with Annex) Concerning West New Guinea (West Irian). Signed at the Headquarters of the United Nations, New York, on 15 August 1962,” 278.

²⁶ Preamble “Agreement on a Comprehensive Political Settlement of the Cambodia Conflict,” 2.

traced to the post-colonial context in which the West New Guinea mission emerged. Here, the UN found itself enabling the interests of recently independent former colonies such as Indonesia in the name of decolonization but to the detriment of the self-determination of local Papuans, who throughout the mission advocated for their own statehood.²⁷ Scholarship on the UN's role in the post-colonial international order highlight how the Organization's 'anti-colonial' orientation it adopted in the 1950s made it partial towards a decolonial project that precluded captured populations such as minorities and secessionist agitators.²⁸ In terms of its direct administration of West New Guinea, the UN's exclusion of any serious commitment to Papuan self-determination was a sign of its deference to the Indonesian administration that was to succeed it.

While UNTAC did not face similar post-colonial dynamics at play in West New Guinea (Cambodia was not transitioning to administration ruling from Hanoi), the legacies of UNTEA were imbedded into the institutional practices of 'direct administration'. The primacy of maintaining political stability in UN administrative practice is an important throughline between both missions, sometimes to the disservice of local populations' desires. UNTAC's mandate and its eventual governance of Cambodia fell into the trappings of direct administration that often betrayed or undermined its human rights goals. What epitomizes the expectation of political neutrality in UNTAC's mandate is that the document itself makes no reference to the Cambodian genocide or human rights violations under the Khmer Rouge regime. Instead, the wording is

²⁷ [Insert introduction to this text] Tudor, "Blue Helmet Bureaucrats: UN Peacekeeping Missions and the Formation of the Post-Colonial International Order, 1956-1971," 128.

²⁸ Mark Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace: The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations*, 1. paperback print, Lawrence Stone Lectures (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), 188.

sufficiently vague so to not provoke political instability during its temporary administration of the country; the mandate's closest reference to the Cambodian genocide was "the policies and practices of the past".²⁹ In the same way the Papuans were deemed as unprepared for self-determination, any true post-genocide rectification or accountability could not happen under the UN transition in Cambodia as determined by its mandate. Rooted in their post-colonial contexts, direct administrations as a tool of UN intervention were designed to be incapable of offering significant recourse to their wronged subjects, given their decision-making structures intentionally were conceived to be isolated from local input.

Cambodia 1970-1989: From Pariah to UN Proving Ground

Locating the origins of UNTAC's mandate within the first instance of United Nations' administration of a territory is useful in demonstrating how the UN officials governing Cambodia were informed by the institutional habits shaped during UNTEA. However, consigning the mission in Cambodia to just another example of 'direct administration' would fail to capture the unprecedented nature of the operation. It was not merely the transfer of power from one regime to another, which was the primarily goal of the Papuan mission. Unlike UNTEA, the UN authority in Cambodia had reconstructive qualities with a humanitarian impetus that genuinely sought to transform the country into a stable democratic state. UNTAC represented a significant expansion of 'direct administration' that was emblematic of momentous shifts in how the UN understood its

²⁹ United Nations, "Agreement on a Comprehensive Political Settlement of the Cambodia Conflict," 2.

role in the twilight of the Cold War. The evolution of ‘direct administration’ into multidimensional ‘peacemaking’ operations signified how the United Nations found itself reinvigorated as Cold War restrictions within the organization and beyond dissipated. Cambodia itself, as a subject of intervention, represented the disassembling of the bipolarity of the post-war world order. A once untouchable recluse largely due to the geopolitical sensitivity of Southeast Asia, Cambodia was increasingly seen by the world not as an unfortunate Cold War battleground but a potential laboratory for international state-building.

Embittered superpower rivalry throughout the UN’s first few decades of existence paralyzed Security Council and polluted its peace operations with Soviet or American interference in local conflicts. While waves of *détente* and periods where tensions were reignited between 1945 and 1989 had their varied effects on the organization, the general consequence of the Cold War on the UN was that its effectiveness as a collective security organization was severely dampened.³⁰ Developments in Cambodia during the Khmer Rouge regime (1974-1979) were met with an acute reluctance by the Security Council to intervene with the genocidal policies of Pol Pot. Especially after the United States’ painful withdrawal from Vietnam in 1973, Southeast Asia was deemed untouchable regarding any type of intervention.³¹

Cambodia, as a subject of intervention before UNTAC, witnessed the full spectrum of competing developmental models that arose in the post-WWII world. Its various regimes illustrate

³⁰ MacQueen, *The United Nations, Peace Operations and the Cold War*, 93.

³¹ Ralph Wilde, “Host Territories—States and State Territories,” in *International Territorial Administration: How Trusteeship and the Civilizing Mission Never Went Away*, ed. Ralph Wilde (Oxford University Press, 2008), 0, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199274321.003.0004>.

the failure of state-building projects that were supported by regional and global players gave way for alternative approaches to the country's reconstruction as the East-West divide subsided by 1989. Between Cambodia's independence in 1953 and 1970, King Norodom Sihanouk—who abdicated in 1953 to become more involved in politics—ruled the “Kingdom of Cambodia” as a typical post-colonial leader who pursued ‘middle way’ economic planning characteristic of Third World state-led development: “There was public investment in state-owned enterprises and experimentation with mixed-economy enterprises and rural cooperatives.”³² In 1970, Sihanouk was ousted and exiled to Beijing by an American-backed coup where General Lon Nol was placed in command of the country. Here, American interventionism in Southeast Asia was reaching its full throttle, with an extensive bombing campaign in the Cambodia's eastern border and the waging of its war against North Vietnamese communists and their insurgency in the Republic of Vietnam. While US-led state building in Phnom Penh between 1970 and 1975 was not as extensive as its efforts to make the Saigon regime a bulwark against communist encroachment in the region, the post-Sihanouk “Republic of Cambodia” only lasted for as long as it did due to significant economic and military assistance from the United States.³³

By 1975, the Lon Nol regime capitulated to the Khmer Rouge insurgency ending the country's brief period as an American-backed “republic”. With significant economic and military assistance from China, the “Democratic Kampuchea” (DK) period saw the dismantling of

³² Margaret Slocomb, *An Economic History of Cambodia in the Twentieth Century* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2010), 123–25.

³³ Chandler, *A History of Cambodia*, 252.

Cambodia's post-colonial political life with the depopulation of all cities and towns, the so-called abolition of class, and the collectivization and ruralization of the country's economy. Under its ultra-Maoist vision for an autarkic rural utopia, the Khmer Rouge regime was preoccupied with cleansing enemies of the revolution from the Cambodian population including intellectuals, city-dwellers, ethnic minorities, and anyone who was employed by the two previous regimes. To borrow David Chandler's synthesis of the DK regime: "The Khmer Rouge [...] set elements of the population against each other in a life and death struggle from which a resplendent new nation was expected to emerge. As these 'contradictions' worked themselves out, over a million people, and perhaps as many as two million, died of disease, overwork, starvation, and executions."³⁴

With the fall of the DK regime in 1979 when 100,000 soldiers of the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN) invaded Cambodia, Hanoi established a protectorate in Cambodia known as the "People's Republic of Kampuchea" (PRK) headed by Chea Sim and Hun Sen—both Khmer Rouge defectors to the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. From 1979 to 1989, the PRK regime, with assistance from the USSR and the Soviet bloc, reversed the radical pursuits of the Khmer Rouge regime with a seemingly rational and technocratic approach to socialism based on Soviet and Vietnamese development models.³⁵ Hun Sen's PRK, after the Vietnamese military occupation ended in 1987, initiated a series of reforms that represented its desire to be part of a post-Soviet

³⁴ David Chandler, "Three Visions of Politics in Cambodia," in *Keeping the Peace: Multidimensional UN Operations in Cambodia and El Salvador*, ed. Michael W. Doyle, Ian Johnstone, and Robert C. Orr (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 45.

³⁵ Michael Vickery, *Kampuchea: Politics, Economics, and Society*, Marxist Regimes Series (London : Boulder: F. Pinter ; L. Rienner Publishers, 1986), 23–32; Margaret Slocomb, *The People's Republic of Kampuchea, 1979-1989: The Revolution after Pol Pot* (Chiang Mai : Silkworm Books, 2003), 79.

world order, where the single-party state changed its name to the “State of Cambodia” (SoC), altered its communist flag, and abandoned Marxist-Leninism as state ideology. During this period, contemporary to the negotiations at Paris, state-owned enterprises were privatized, foreign investment encouraged, and market-forces were introduced to the Cambodian economy for the first time since 1975.³⁶

The transition from the PRK to SoC was an important step in not only Cambodia’s transition away from communism, but in how the country was fashioned into a potential site for a new form of international state-building interventions. Cambodia’s political evolution since its independence was marked by a series of regimes that were cut short by Cold War conflict; Hun Sen’s SoC denoted the end to the country’s ideological seesawing and where it could finally be integrated into a global community, but with the substantial help of the UN. By 1989, the appetite for unilateral state-building projects—especially in Southeast Asia—had been significantly reduced as the Soviets sought to reduce aid to Hanoi and by extension the PKR regime in Phnom Penh, and as the US aimed to avoid being involved in the region in any significant way.³⁷ The vacuum of interest in Cambodia gave room for alternative approaches to reconstructing the country, where the financial and reputational risk of failure did not fall onto a single state. Thus, where the US-backed Lon Nol regime, Chinese-backed Khmer Rouge, and Soviet and Vietnam-backed PRK

³⁶ Chandler, “Three Visions of Politics in Cambodia,” 50.

³⁷ Jin Song, “The Political Dynamics of the Peacekeeping Process in Cambodia,” in *Keeping the Peace: Multidimensional UN Operations in Cambodia and El Salvador*, ed. Michael W. Doyle, Ian Johnstone, and Robert C. Orr (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 58–59.

regimes had failed, the United Nations was to succeed in creating a durable Cambodian state now that the East-West divide had subsided.

“An Agenda for Peace”: New Interventionism (1989-1992)

Developments in Cambodia as the impetus for a re-envisioned approach to state building simultaneously occurred with changes within the United Nations in the emergence of a post-Cold War international order. The materialization of a major expansion of UN direct administration to include a state building directive not only arose out of Cambodia as a potential laboratory, but also within the UN itself where the organization found itself reinvigorated at the close of the decade. UNTAC’s mandate represented the first instance of a new species of peacekeeping mission that could have only materialize out of the historical moment that occurred between 1989-1992. These years, not by coincidence, overlap with the development of UNTAC’s charter from the early negotiations in Paris during the summer of 1989 to the official creation of the UN operation in Cambodia in 1992 by Security Council Resolution 745.³⁸ Between the first meetings in Hôtel Majestic and February 1992, the geopolitical order had changed, the Soviet Union was no longer, and the United Nations found itself unshackled from the limitations of the previous decades.

In January 1992, the United Nations General Assembly elected a new Secretary-General, Boutros Boutros-Ghali of Egypt, who by February announced that the Organization was entering

³⁸ UN. Security Council (47th year:1992), “Security Council Resolution 745 (1992) [on Establishment of the UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC)]” (United Nations Digital Library, February 28, 1992), S/RES/745(1992), United Nations Digital Library, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/138379?ln=en>.

a new era: “The nations and peoples of the United Nations are fortunate in a way that those of the League of Nations were not. We have been given a second chance to create the world of our Charter that they were denied. With the Cold War ended we have drawn back from brink of a confrontation that threatened the world, and, too often, paralyzed our organization.”³⁹ Here, Boutros-Ghali’s *An Agenda for Peace* (1992) epitomizes the spirit of hopefulness and reinvention that took hold of the Organization at the turn of the decade, where renewed cooperation within the Permanent Five (P5) member-states of the Security Council made an enhanced UN role in conflict resolution possible.⁴⁰

With P5 support, peacekeeping and ‘direct administration’ took on an emboldened form. Looking retrospectively, United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) published a report describing the effect of Boutros-Ghali’s agenda on future peacekeeping missions: “Over the last decade, United Nations peacekeeping operations have undergone drastic modifications to cope with the many international and regional conflicts that have erupted since the ending of the East-West confrontation... the mandates have become more complex and comprehensive, as the United Nations is no longer expected simply to maintain a ceasefire.”⁴¹ The first of these ‘comprehensive’ peacekeeping missions was UNTAC, representing not only a much expanded version of ‘direct administration’ but also the newfound confidence of the UN at the turn of the

³⁹ Boutros Boutros-Ghali, *An Agenda for Peace: Preventive Diplomacy, Peacemaking, and Peace-Keeping: Report of the Secretary-General Pursuant to the Statement Adopted by the Summit Meeting of the Security Council on 31 January 1992* /, n.d.

⁴⁰ MacQueen and MacQueen, *The United Nations, Peace Operations and the Cold War*, 201.

⁴¹ Nassrine Azimi, Institute of Policy Studies (Singapore), and United Nations Institute for Training and Research, eds., *The United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC): Debriefing and Lessons: Report and Recommendations of the International Conference, Singapore, August 1994* (London ; Boston: Kluwer Law International, 1995), 4.

decade. In an address on UNTAC in 1994, Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali places the mission within the historical moment the Organization saw itself a critical part of:

The United Nations is leading the way into a new era. [...] In this second generation of peacekeeping every mission is unique, yet each has in common a greater scale, more extensive civilian participation, and a far more comprehensive approach to address the problems which at times afflict and entire society and state. The United Nations mission in Cambodia over the past few years has served as the flagship for this United Nations-led voyage to the future.⁴²

Thus, UNTAC was the first test of the UN's new era, where 'comprehensive' peacekeeping had to face the real challenge of governance as it attempted to navigate the complicated reality of Cambodia's fractured politics.

⁴² Boutros Boutros-Ghali, "Message," in *The United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC): Debriefing and Lessons: Report and Recommendations of the International Conference, Singapore, August 1994*, ed. Nassrine Azimi, Institute of Policy Studies (Singapore), and United Nations Institute for Training and Research (London ; Boston: Kluwer Law International, 1995).

Chapter 2: “Cambodia is not a UN protectorate”: The UN Administration in Cambodia

“We face a historic challenge. UNTAC will be the largest, most complicated, most ambitious and, I am afraid, most expensive operation in the 47-year history of the United Nations.”

— Yasushi Akashi, Special Representative of the Secretary General⁴³

“We did not see them. The peacekeepers would travel through the town in their trucks to go into their compound.”

— Kaing “Houng” Buny, Pursat Province⁴⁴

By mid-March 1993, UNTAC became operational when it absorbed its predecessor UNAMIC (United Nations Advanced Mission in Cambodia). The UN administration of Cambodia thus embarked on a unique state-building project unlike any prior mission. The Administrators arrived at the endeavor with a sense of bravado that reflective the utopian triumphalism that took hold of the UN at the beginning of the decade. At the helm of the mission was Yasushi Akashi, SRSG (Special Representative of the Secretary-General), an experienced Japanese diplomat and UN administrator. At Akashi’s side, General John Sanderson of the Australian Defense Forces was the Force Commander of UNTAC’s Military Component. Unlike any former UN missions, UNTAC’s ‘comprehensive’ approach meant that the UN’s presence in Cambodia was not just traditional peacekeeping but rather a multitude of state-building efforts happening simultaneously: civil administration, public security and policing, special control of Cambodia’s natural resources, a Human Rights component, an Electoral Component, a Military Component, and administrative

⁴³ Michael Littlejohns, “Cambodia to Get 16,000 UN Troops,” *Financial Times*, February 21, 1992.

⁴⁴ Houng Kaing, Kaing “Houng” Bunny, interview by Author, November 13, 2022.

structures dedicated to repatriation efforts and refugee issues. As the UNTAC staff began their tenure as the caretaker government of Cambodia, the spirit of Boutros-Ghali's *Agenda for Peace*, the UN's mentality of optimism, and the trust in Human Rights as a tenable legal framework for governance, now had to be applied to the complicated reality of Cambodia in 1992.

In the available scholarship and UN retrospective literature, UNTAC has often been examined in terms of whether it was a success. In much of the literature, the mission's limitations have largely been attributed to the immense logistical issues it faced and the breakdown of cooperation and adherence to the mandate by two of Cambodia's political factions, the State of Cambodia (SoC) and especially the Party of Democratic Kampuchea (PDK)—the successor party to the Khmer Rouge. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, in 1995, qualifies UNTAC's performance in Cambodia: "it was breaking new ground, UNTAC involved both risk and experimentation."⁴⁵ Some scholars contend that despite the various hardships and setbacks UN administrators faced, UNTAC was ultimately "successful in providing the Cambodian people an opportunity to experience the democratic process for the first time...[UNTAC] gave Cambodia a chance to establish its own peace."⁴⁶ The emergent consensus in the literature is that UNTAC's functional limitations largely laid in the refusal of the Khmer Rouge to observe the Paris Agreement. Continuous violations of ceasefire and the occasional deterioration of the security situation had a freezing effect on UNTAC's functions. Additionally, political factions' grasp on Existing

⁴⁵ Boutros-Ghali, "Message," 63.

⁴⁶ Cheryl Kim and Mark Metrikas, "Holding a Fragile Peace: The Military and Civilian Components of UNTAC," in *Keeping the Peace: Multidimensional UN Operations in Cambodia and El Salvador*, ed. Michael W. Doyle, Ian Johnstone, and Robert C. Orr (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 133.

Administrative Structures (EASs) that UNTAC's Civil Administration Component sought to reform and control "forced [UNTAC] to back down over some of its bolder attempts to end a climate of impunity for human rights abuse."⁴⁷

However, the broader discourse on UNTAC's successes and failures often leaves out the voices of the Administrators and Cambodians themselves. The Administration's logistical issues, and the adversity it confronted as the Khmer Rouge resumed insurgent activities, and as the State of Cambodia (SOC) encroached upon UN administrative control; have been well documented externally by international and domestic press, Human Rights groups and other observer organizations. Yet, the internal record—drawing from UNTAC's archival documents—illustrates how the initial approach of UNTAC officials shifted from the spirit of optimism that marked the beginning of the decade to a retracted pragmatism as the mission faced the harsh realities of governing Cambodia. During this shift as the mission entered uncertain territory, UN provincial administrators and the directors of the mission's various components sometimes found themselves at odds with each other as they competed for the UNTAC's limited financial, personnel, and logistical resources.

The fluctuating attitudes of the Authority offers an unexplored and corrective lens in evaluating the Transitional Authority. It complicates the narrative of the UNTAC's homogeneity as an administrative machine,⁴⁸ as documents show not only lateral disagreement within UNTAC's

⁴⁷ Caroline Hughes, *UNTAC in Cambodia: The Impact on Human Rights*, Occasional Paper, no. 92 (Singapore: Indochina Programme, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1996), 71.

⁴⁸ Caroline Hughes, *The Political Economy of Cambodia's Transition, 1991-2001* (London ; New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003).

organizational structure but also discord across its bureaucratic hierarchy. As the mission progressed, these disagreements represented the Administration's shifting priorities as it turned away from its 'comprehensive' nature of its mandate. Instead, Akashi and his senior staff adopted a 'withdrawal' mentality that prioritized the facilitation of elections and the timely departure of the UN presence in Cambodia.

When the World Invaded Cambodia (March–July, 1992)

“Finally, we are in the post-Cold War period in which Cambodia had been the scene of a proxy war, has all the external conditions for restoring peace and national reconciliation. The United Nations is here to facilitate that process, to serve as a catalyst, as an element for national healing. I feel we are very much needed and very much welcomed.”⁴⁹ These were the remarks given by SRSR Akashi in May 1992, three months into UNTAC's arrival during a press conference with international journalist in Phnom Penh. To the world, the UNTAC head administrator presented a face of optimism, believing that the Administration he directed was the only way for Cambodia to move forward to a lasting peace. His remarks are a window into the early hopefulness that UN staff in the early stages of the mission felt. Similarly, nearly two hundred kilometers northwest of Phnom Penh, in the provincial capital of Battambang, regular Cambodians rejoiced in the arrival of the UN peacekeeping forces. Muykech Chhun, who was a teenager attending a

⁴⁹ *World Chronicle 473: Yasushi Akashi, UNTAC*, Video, World Chronicle (Cambodia, 1992), <https://www.unmultimedia.org/avlibrary/asset/2113/2113010/>.

midwifery school in Battambang Province, recalls: “People waved and welcomed them as they arrived. It was a happy moment. They were Malaysian and Pakistani. The world had come to help us. We did not fear the UN peacekeepers like we feared the Vietnamese.”⁵⁰

Yet, the initial elation dissipated quite quickly. Firstly, logistical issues hampered much of the administration’s progress during the early months. “The slow pace of the recruitment and deployment of civilian staff...particularly of the civil administration component, could impair UNTAC’s ability to exercise adequate supervision and control where required,” wrote the Secretary-General in his first report to the Security Council in early May.⁵¹ For the Civil Administration Component, the lack of support staff meant that there were delays in evaluating the existing administrative structures of the various political factions in order to assume control over them. In other aspects of the Authority, staff shortages—especially specialized military personnel—slowed the survey of land needed for transit camps for repatriated refugees. This task was especially important since much of the countryside in the northwest provinces was heavily inundated with landmines.⁵²

Beyond staff and equipment shortages, Cambodia’s remote geography and limited-to-no infrastructure made it difficult for UNTAC peacekeeping and civilian personnel to access even its

⁵⁰ Muykech Chhun, Chunn Muykech, interview by Author, November 11, 2022.

⁵¹ Boutros Boutros-Ghali, “First Progress Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia.” ([New York] :. 1992-05-01: UN, May 1992), S/23870, United Nations Digital Library, <http://digitallibrary.un.org/record/142000>.

⁵² Cambodia has one of the highest rates of amputees per capita due to the heavy landmine presence (“Clearing Landmines & Making Land Safe In Cambodia,” The HALO Trust USA, [https://www.halousa.org/where-we-work/south-asia/cambodia/.](https://www.halousa.org/where-we-work/south-asia/cambodia/))

provincial capitals. Siem Reap, the country's second largest city, could only be accessed in the first three months of the mission by plane or helicopter.⁵³ An internal report, created during this early period of the Administration by the Advanced Electoral Planning Unit (AEPU), on the living conditions and the accessibility of the provinces noted the lack of running water, stable electricity, and insufficient sanitary conditions for UN staff in most major towns. In terms of infrastructure, "practically all roads need serious repair or major reconstruction."⁵⁴ In the report, only six out of Cambodia's eighteen provinces were deemed as "favorable" in terms of living conditions. On a lighter note, the report notes that "people in the provinces were usually very enthusiastic to see UN staff and vehicles." However, this was three months into UNTAC's operational period and it was likely that the AEPU teams were the first UN personnel that visited the more remote provinces.

The early logistical issues that affected UNTAC's deployment and the initiation of its various operations were, however, surmountable. The Security Council had approved the allocation of over three billion dollars for the Authority and other regional interests were eager to provide funds. The national governments of Japan, Malaysia, and Australia were volunteering immense amounts of capital to fund UNTAC and were donating large quantities of specialized equipment.⁵⁵ As equipment and personnel arrivals accelerated by May 1992, all provincial capitals

⁵³ Benny Widyono, *Dancing in Shadows: Sihanouk, the Khmer Rouge, and the United Nations in Cambodia*, Asian Voices (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008), 5–8.

⁵⁴ AEPU, "Consolidated Report on Living Conditions of the Provinces of Cambodia Based Upon AEPU/UNTAC Teams Visits" (UNARMS, May 5, 1992), S-0794-0030-03 (UNTAC – 1/23.1 Electoral - General - Electoral Component - Part 1), United Nations Archive New York.

⁵⁵ Peter James Spielman, "High Price Tag Of U.N. Force Delays Full Deployment Of Peacekeepers," *Associated Press*, February 26, 1992, Dow Jones Factiva, https://global-factiva-com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/ga/default.aspx?page_driver=searchBuilder_Search&; Associated Press, "Price Tag

and most major towns even in the remotest parts of the country (the northern and northeastern provinces of Preah Vihear, Stung Treng, Ratanakiri, Kratie, and Mondolkiri) would eventually see the arrival of UNTAC peacekeeping and administrative personnel. By the mid-summer of 1992, UNTAC's uneven administrative reach—at least to some extent—touched all corners of the country.

Searching for a “neutral political environment” (August—December 1992)

As the Authority prevailed over the initial logistical problems of its deployment, more significant problems arose that could not be solved by importing more UN personnel, peacekeepers, or the allocation of extra funds. While the Transitional Authority completed its first two phases, establishing a presence in all provinces and reaching full personnel capacity by the end of August, the significant and deeply entrenched problems of governance arose as UNTAC and its senior staff navigated the competing interests of Cambodia's political factions.⁵⁶ More significantly, the breakdown of the cantonment and disarmament process caused a worsening security situation which would prove to be a significant blow to the progress of the Mission. Caused by the deteriorating relations between UNTAC and Democratic Kampuchea (DK—also known as the

Delays Yugoslavia Peacekeepers,” *The Las Vegas Review-Journal*, February 27, 1992, Dow Jones Factiva, https://global-factiva-com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/ga/default.aspx?page_driver=searchBuilder_Search&; “Senate Poised to Approve U.S. Aid for U.N. Operation in Cambodia,” *Agence France-Presse*, April 1, 1992, https://global-factiva-com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/ga/default.aspx?page_driver=searchBuilder_Search&.

⁵⁶ Gérard Porcell, “Speech Draft: How Advanced Is the Control of the Civil Administration Component?” (UNARMS, June 26, 1992), 6, S-0794-0028-01 (UNTAC - 1/22.1. - Civil Administration - General - Part 1), United Nations Archive Geneva.

Khmer Rouge), the failure to disarm factions greatly frustrated the realization of the much-repeated and shared goal of the Civil Administration Component, Military Component, and the Electoral Component: “the creation and nurturing of a neutral political environment conducive to free and fair elections.”⁵⁷ As a result, the initial confidence of the Administration’s senior staff was shattered; from UNTAC’s headquarters in Phnom Penh to the various provincial offices throughout the country, the morale of the international staff throughout the mission’s components plummeted, and the jubilation felt in the early months among the Cambodian population dissipated.

Once UNTAC reached its full operating capacity by the summer of 1992, the Civil Administration Component turned its efforts away from procurement to taking control of Cambodia’s pre-existing administrative structures as mandated by the Paris Agreement. The director of the Civil Administration, Gérard Porcell—a French judge with no previous UN experience,⁵⁸ outlines in an internal report for the Administration’s senior staff the progress in establishing footholds within Cambodia’s existing administrative structures (EAS):⁵⁹

The role of the Civil Administration in the Cambodian peace process is increasing. One can cite the finalization of the expenditure control procedure by the Financial Service, the decision [...] to exercise control over the “Council of Ministers” of the SoC [“State of Cambodia”] administrative structure, the establishment of a comprehensive border control mechanism [...], the planning of

⁵⁷ Civil Administration, “Internal Document: Summary of Civil Administration Training Workshop #1: Thursday, 11 June 1992” (UNARMS, June 11, 1992), S-0794-0028-01 (UNTAC - 1/22.1. - Civil Administration - General - Part 1), United Nations Archive Geneva; Gérard Porcell, “Letter: Procedures When Working with Ministers and Other Civil Institutions” (UNARMS, June 26, 1992), S-0794-0028-01 (UNTAC - 1/22.1. - Civil Administration - General - Part 1), United Nations Archive Geneva.

⁵⁸ Widyono, *Dancing in Shadows*, 6.

⁵⁹ Internal documents referred to ‘existing administrative structures’ as EASs. Examples of EASs include the State of Cambodia (SoC), which evolved out of the Vietnamese puppet state People’s Republic of Kampuchea (PRK), 1979-1989, and was the *de facto* government of Cambodia, controlling most of the country’s territory by the time of UNTAC’s arrival.

specialized control operations in telecommunications and civil aviation, [...] and the determined efforts by the Civil Administration to stem the outbreak in early November of political imitation against FUNCINPEC and BLDP political party officials, in close cooperation with CIVPOL [UNTAC's civilian police component] and Human Rights [Component].⁶⁰

Porcell's internal report provides a useful window into the complexity of the Civil Administration's Component's tasks, which involved navigating the checkered landscape of the country's pre-UNTAC administrative structures to prepare the country for elections in May. The largest and most powerful EAS was the State of Cambodia (SoC), which the most evolved structures due to over a decade of *de facto* governance of Cambodia. Lesser EASs that controlled significantly smaller amounts of territory during UNTAC's arrival include FUNCINPEC,⁶¹ the Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF), and the Khmer Rouge, officially Democratic Kampuchea (DK).

The Civil Administration had the simultaneous and intimate tasks of maintaining a stable working relationship with each and between the EASs while slowly entering their various administrative structures to control, combine, monitor, and reform them. As outlined in the Paris Agreement, the Civil Administration Component was intended to directly supervise "agencies, bodies and offices [that] could directly influence the outcome of the elections."⁶² The task required

⁶⁰ Gérard Porcell and Civil Administration HQ Office, "Activity Report: November 1992 Civil Administration" (UNARMS, December 11, 1992), 1–2, S-0794-0028-01 (UNTAC - 1/22.1. - Civil Administration - General - Part 1), United Nations Archive Geneva.

⁶¹ The French acronym for the National United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful and Cooperative Cambodia. FUNCINPEC began as a royalist resistance movement to the PRK in 1982.

⁶² United Nations, "Agreement on a Comprehensive Political Settlement of the Cambodia Conflict," Annex 1, Section B: "Civil Administration."

a personal touch. As Porcell notes with a tone of regret in his November 1992 report, “Civil Administration does not have the authority or the human resources physically to take [full] control of the [EASs]. *Cambodia is not a UN protectorate* [emphasis added]. The implementation of control mechanisms is a lengthy process involving considerable negotiation.”⁶³ In essence, the effectiveness of the Administration’s control of the country’s state structures—from foreign affairs, the issuing of passports, and public security, to its state financial institutions—rested on political factions fully cooperating. More specifically, it rested on the successful negotiation of power sharing agreements between each of the “ministries” of each of the factions with the Civil Administration Component. As Porcell noted, the nature of Cambodian government between 1992-1993 certainly was not a UN protectorate, but rather it was the meticulously diplomatic interweaving of UN civil administration control personnel within the country’s pre-existing government structures.⁶⁴ It was a tenuous and fragile system, and the integrity and credibility of Cambodia’s planned May 1993 elections depended on it working.

After the Civil Administration Component officially finished its ‘Phase I’ and ‘Phase II’ deployment, UNTAC’s dance of governance was severely threatened by a rapidly declining security situation. Concurrent to UN administrators’ attempt to reign in control of the EASs, the

⁶³ Porcell and Civil Administration HQ Office, “Activity Report: November 1992 Civil Administration,” 1.

⁶⁴ As the deployment phases were wrapping up on 26 June 1992, Gérard Porcell disseminated to each of the components a document titled “Procedures when working with ministries and other civil institutions” that outlined advice and protocol for UNTAC component directs when dealing with SoC administrative structures. To show how elusive SoC state structures were, Porcell writes: “...you might assume that the Vice–Minister X is the person to see, when Vice Minister Y turns out to be the responsible person; or, you might be unaware of relevant officials that the Ministry might otherwise have invited.” Porcell, “Letter: Procedures When Working with Ministers and Other Civil Institutions,” 2.

Military Component was tasked to pursue traditional peacekeeping tasks as well as the cantonment and disarmament of the militaries of each of Cambodia's four factions. However, by November 1992 it was clear that the peacekeeping force was failing in its mandate,⁶⁵ which not only had significant consequences for the Civil Administration's efforts but also threatened the entirety of UNTAC's presence in Cambodia. Special Representative Akashi, speaking to the *Phnom Penh Post* in an interview commemorating one year since the signing of the Paris Agreements, noted that the DK's refusal to disarm and demobilize "constitutes a threat and challenge to the whole peace process and to the prestige also of the United Nations."⁶⁶ Soon after the interview, the Khmer Rouge failed to meet a November 15 Security Council deadline to resume cooperation and adherence to the Paris Agreement, and by early December, the Military Component had failed in its disarmament mandate. Due to the Khmer Rouge refusal to disarm, other factions—especially SoC—refused to demobilize in response, a volatile security situation that did not meet the Paris Agreement's conditions for elections was created. In an internal report produced in December, senior administrators acknowledged the deteriorating situation: "for all intents and purposes, [...] the regroupment and cantonment process, as well as the demobilization of at least 70 percent of the cantoned forces has been abandoned."⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Boutros Boutros-Ghali, "Second Progress Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia.," September 21, 1992, 16 p.

⁶⁶ Caroline Gluck, "One Year After the Paris Accords: An Interview with Yasushi Akashi," *Phnom Penh Post*, November 6, 1992, Dow Jones Factiva, https://global-factiva-com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/ga/default.aspx?page_driver=searchBuilder_Search&.

⁶⁷ Porcell and Civil Administration HQ Office, "Activity Report: November 1992 Civil Administration."

The failure of disarmament meant UNTAC's civilian components—as they readied the country and its institutions for the elections of a national assembly and promulgation of a constitution in the next year—now had to operate in a volatile security environment and with factions that were increasingly reverting to their pre-UNTAC postures. The more cooperative factions (SoC, FUNCINPEC, and KPNLF), were still willing to continue with electoral planning, but sought to delay the Civil Administration's supervision of their administrative structures in the wake of Khmer Rouge non-compliance. Governing Cambodia, or at the very least the pursuit of creating politically neutral state structures before the elections, was greatly frustrated by the progressively uncooperative factions. In the face of SoC stonewalling, UN administrators grew more discouraged and anxious about whether the country was ready for elections planned for May 1993, especially with the potential for mass political violence due to the failed disarmament initiative.⁶⁸ The fear was that if EASs—especially SoC—avoided UNTAC control mechanisms, they could use their state apparatus to gain leverage in the electoral process, which had significant human rights implications if factions systematically pursued voter intimidation or even violence. By late December, Civil Administration officials were already recording exponentially increasing amounts of political violence, as an internally circulated “Activity Report” acknowledged:

The month of December witnessed a marked increase in the frequency of attacks against political party offices and their personnel. Despite the repeated interventions of the Special Representative and the Civil Administration. [...] it cannot be stated at this time that a neutral political environment

⁶⁸ Gérard Porcell and Civil Administration Component, “Activity Report of Civil Administration, December 1992” (UNARMS, January 25, 1993), 1–3, S-0794-0028-02 (UNTAC - 1/22.1. - Civil Administration - General - Part 2), United Nations Archive Geneva.

conducive to free and fair general elections—the central focus of the Civil Administration—is being ensured.⁶⁹

The deteriorating political environment during November and December had a tangibly demoralizing effect throughout the Administration’s international staff as the Authority adjusted its expectations and mission goals heading into the new year. As the planned May elections and subsequent UN withdrawal appeared on the horizon, the Administration’s senior staff in Cambodia and New York re-evaluated their priorities for UNTAC. It is in this shift away from the initial optimism that permeated within the UN and throughout Cambodia in the spring and summer of 1992 that the cracks in the Authority’s unity of purpose began to materialize. Between UNTAC’s components, and even within them, conflicting priorities competed for their realization. The clash between the pursuit of the Human Rights ideal and the sober pragmatism of a timely and uncomplicated UN withdrawal came to a head. Pressure from New York as UNTAC faced the reality of Cambodia’s uneasy political life ensured that its head administrators had to sacrifice parts of UNTAC’s utopian vision for something much more feasible. In fact, the mantra of “feasibility” would come to dominate UNTAC’s internal discourse in the remaining months of its mission, bringing forth pared-down policy making along with it.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

Casting Stones (December 1992—March 1993)

Where the discord between UNTAC's components tangibly affected the day-to-day operations of the Authority can be seen in the logistical disparities that arose in the months leading to the May 1993 elections. As the UN administration entered the new year, the heightened security situation—due to the failed disarmament process—meant that one of the major priorities of the Military Component lay in peacekeeping and deterrence between the country's heavily armed factions. Violations of the ceasefire increased throughout December as SoC's Cambodian People's Armed Forces (CPAF) and the Khmer Rouge army (NADK) sparred with one another in the northern provinces.⁷⁰ Because of the need to relocate peacekeeping troops to provinces with higher rates of ceasefire violations, UNTAC's transportation services prioritized military personnel over civilian administrative staff, to the detriment of the functioning of UNTAC's other components.

The Civil Administration's senior staff, grew infuriated, as they regarded their own work just as vital to the achievement of the mission's mandate as maintaining the ceasefire. An exasperated George Kaboré,⁷¹ Civil Administration Provincial Director of Ratanakiri Province—where significant ceasefire violations were taking place, wrote to Deputy SRSG Behrooz Sadry: “Trying to board a flight has become the most feared exercise for our staff. They are constantly

⁷⁰ Porcell and Civil Administration Component, “Activity Report of Civil Administration, December 1992.”

⁷¹ All examined archival documents only refer to Kaboré as ‘G. Kaboré’. The only reference to his first name being ‘George’ is a 30 July 1993 *Phnom Penh Post* article on the withdrawal of the Uruguayan peacekeeping battalion from Ratanakiri province during the end of UNTAC. (“Urubbatt Set to Pullout,” *Phnom Penh Post*, July 30, 1993, <https://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/urubbatt-set-pullout>.)

humiliated and even disregarded as persons.”⁷² Many staff, according to Kaboré’s letter, were left stranded for days in remote towns when they were offloaded from helicopters to make room for military personnel. It took over a week for Kaboré’s complaints to be brought to the attention of the SRSG’s office, which needed Gérard Porcell himself—the director of the Civil Administration—to bring the issue to Akashi. Porcell, when raising these problems, noted, “civilian personnel [are] constantly put at a disadvantage when compared to military staff. This has an effect on the morale of the staff [...] it also has an effect on the efficiency of the mission: CIVPOL, Electoral and CIVADMIN are frequently experiencing problems because their staff is [sic] late for meetings.”⁷³

Even within the Civil Administration, disagreement arose across within its bureaucracy especially between the provincial directors and the component’s senior staff located in Phnom Penh. It showed a disunity in the approach needed to effectively control the EASs in the face of not only constant delays and obstructions by the factions, but also escalating political violence as the election neared.⁷⁴ In his memoir on his time as the UN provincial director of Siem Reap province, Benny Widiono accused Director Porcell—his boss—of “having a lack of interest in the

⁷² George Kaboré, “Internal Correspondence: Difficulties Encountered by UNTAC Staff of the Province of Ratanakiri in Their Trvales to and from Phnom Penh” (UNARMS, December 2, 1993), 2, S-0794-0028-02 (UNTAC - 1/22.1. - Civil Administration - General - Part 2), United Nations Archive Geneva.

⁷³ Gérard Porcell, “Interoffice Memorandum: Travel Difficulties of Civilian Staff in Remort Provinces” (UNARMS, December 14, 1992), S-0794-0028-02 (UNTAC - 1/22.1. - Civil Administration - General - Part 2), United Nations Archive Geneva; Gérard Porcell, “Interoffice Memorandum: Use of Cars” (UNARMS, December 7, 1992), S-0794-0028-02 (UNTAC - 1/22.1. - Civil Administration - General - Part 2), United Nations Archive Geneva.

⁷⁴ Eduardo Vetere, “Activity Report for the Service of Public Security, 28 Nov. – 11 Dec.” (UNARMS, n.d.), S-0794-0028-03 (UNTAC - 1/22.1. - Civil Administration - Public Security), United Nations Archive Geneva.

provincial structure of UNTAC.”⁷⁵ Post-mission analysis of UNTAC in the UN’s retrospective literature reveal that Phnom Penh-based officials were often misled by SoC “Ministries”, which were largely empty shells of central administrative structures. The actual SoC policy-making apparatus existed instead in concealed parallel structures within the various “Ministries” and in its autonomous provincial “governors”, which Widyono in Siem Reap would have realized weeks before Porcell, with him located in the capital Phnom Penh.⁷⁶

UNTAC’s head administrators had completely misjudged Cambodia’s powerbase. “Vice-ministers” who held real ministerial power eluded UNTAC’s oversight as the Civil Administration focused on “ministers” and their immediate staff and offices in Phnom Penh. The capital as the seat of central decision-making for Cambodia’s existing state structures was an illusion that fooled the UN administrators, where the real root of SoC disruption came from its provincial governors, who operated largely autonomously without any oversight from Phnom Penh. To the exasperation of UN provincial directors, such as Widyono, the Civil Administration in the capital fell down the rabbit hole of trying to control and reform SoC “ministries” that were mostly superficial and with no real power. In the eyes of UN officials stationed throughout the provinces, the mission had wasted precious time, distracted by the false task of reigning in empty ministries and Potemkin state structures in Phnom Penh.

⁷⁵ Widyono, *Dancing in Shadows*, 67.

⁷⁶ Azimi, Institute of Policy Studies (Singapore), and United Nations Institute for Training and Research, *The United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC)*, 21.

The discord between UN provincial directors and the Civil Administration head director office speaks to the larger miscalculations of UNTAC's mission, and the assumptions that were written into its mandate. Previous UN direct administration missions usually inherited fully or semi-functioning state structures. In the case of UNTAC's Papuan predecessor, UNTEA (1962), the Dutch colonial administration of the territory was robust enough administration for an effective UN takeover.⁷⁷ Owing to the complete dismantling of the country's post-colonial political order during the DK regime between 1974-1979 and the feeble reconstruction of administrative structures during the PRK era, the UN mandate had misjudged the extent Cambodia's SoC regime successfully rebuilt a viable state apparatus.⁷⁸

Before Casting Ballots (March–April 1993)

Internal discord between and throughout UNTAC's components was part of the process of the mission shifting its priorities from the true 'comprehensive' nature of its mandate to prioritizing a timely withdrawal with the successful running of elections. UNTAC's leadership, after governing the country for the first half of its allocated time in Cambodia, realized the impossibilities of its 'comprehensive' mandate. In the final months before the election, UNTAC's Civil Administration, other civilian-led components, and the military component, directed their attention to electoral planning. The 'withdrawal' mentality in these final months before polling

⁷⁷ Tudor, "Blue Helmet Bureaucrats: UN Peacekeeping Missions and the Formation of the Post-Colonial International Order, 1956-1971," 241.

⁷⁸ Chandler, *A History of Cambodia*, 326.

was not universally accepted by some of the mission's top officials, who saw their vital non-electoral work as being disregarded by Akashi and his team in Phnom Penh.

By March 1993, the Civil Administration instructed its provincial officers to redirect their efforts to reigning in local EAS authorities in preparation for the upcoming elections. With less than three months before polling, Director Gérard Porcell finally focused his attention on the provinces. In the Administrative Component's report for March, his office detailed how the provincial activity of the component had increased with an eye towards preparing for the elections: "the director has asked that provincial officers strengthen their number of current practices related to the elections, such as weekly coordination meetings [with Cambodian EAS] and roundtables with the political parties. Provincial directors are advised to increase their collaboration with [UNTAC provincial electoral officers] at the provincial level..."⁷⁹ Shortly after the March report, a guidance document titled "Objectives in the Lead-up to the General Elections" was transmitted to all UNTAC provincial offices. The document directed these field offices to "monitor, interdict and prevent EAS officials...from conducting political activities during their normal working hours," and to prevent elements of EAS from using public buildings and government offices for "partisan purpose."⁸⁰ Since trying to control EASs from Phnom Penh was met with disappointment, securing a neutral political environment now had to be done on a local level with limited manpower and limited time before the first votes were to be cast.

⁷⁹ Civil Administration, "Civil Administration: Activity Report, March 1993" (UNARMS, April 19, 1993), 2, S-0794-0028-02 (UNTAC - 1/22.1. - Civil Administration - General - Part 2), United Nations Archive Geneva.

⁸⁰ Civil Administration, "Civil Administration: Activity Report, March 1993."

However, the Civil Administration's late electoral efforts were not met with enthusiasm from other civilian-led components of the mission. One of the main duties of the provincial Civil Administration offices was to support the UNTAC's Human Rights component, another civilian-led aspect of the mission. UNTAC's Human Rights component was occupied throughout the mission with three main activities: legal, judicial, and penal review; information, training and education on human rights issues; monitoring and investigating human rights violations during the transition period.⁸¹ Its efforts crucially required the Civil Administration's provincial reach and its coordination in order to have access with representatives of Cambodia's EASs and the nascent political parties. Its legal and judicial activities required significant interaction with the Civil Administration's headquarters in Phnom Penh and with offices within provincial capitals. Yet, the Civil Administration's pivot towards electoral planning left the Human Rights Component neglected. Speaking in an interview in 1998, Dennis McNamara—UNTAC's Human Rights Director—complained about how his component was left overlooked and sidelined during its operations:

[The Human Rights Component was] independent to the point of sometimes being unsupported...We were independent, until we bumped up against the political sensitivities, which was a fairly regular occurrence—either with the Special Representative, his deputy, or the heads of the Components...If you're going to have free and fair elections in a neutral political environment, it's about human rights in a broad sense. There was a very great need for at least the heads of

⁸¹ The Human Rights Component was not mandated to investigate any violations that occurred in the past, such as issues related the Cambodian genocide or ethnic violence occurring in the previous PRK regime. In one document, goals of the Component were outlined in an educational session at the beginning of UNTAC between all the components' directors. See: Civil Administration Component, "Summary of Civil Administration Training Workshop #2" (UNARMS, June 25, 1992), S-0794-0028-01 (UNTAC - 1/22.1. - Civil Administration - General - Part 1), United Nations Archive Geneva.

components, and the heads of the Mission, to have a basic understanding of what the human rights framework entailed, and I'm afraid that was not the case.⁸²

McNamara's frustrations were emblematic of the consequences of the Authority's reorientation towards electoral planning in March that had a ripple effect throughout UNTAC's components.

The annoyances of UNTAC's human rights chief also speak the wider effects of the Administration's 'withdrawal mentality' that it adopted in the face of the mission's failure to fully disarm the country's factions and an increasingly volatile security situation. Without the successful running of elections, the UN administration risked being a caretaker government of a country on the verge of civil war. March and April marked an increase of political violence and the Khmer Rouge was already engaging in skirmishes with the armed forces of SoC.⁸³ When asked about Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali's visits to Cambodia and his impressions of the operation, McNamara noted: "I would say that his overwhelming message was, 'We've got to have these elections and get out.' [...] 'This was a \$2 billion dollar, expensive operation, and you had to have those elections and go,' was the message."⁸⁴ Here, the 'withdrawal mentality' was made clear by the Secretary-General himself, who risked his own reputation if his flagship mission of the *Agenda for Peace* United Nations could not even pull off elections, when it was already inadequate in disarmament and reaching full administrative control of the country.

⁸² Dennis McNamara and James S. Sutterlin, "Interview with Dennis McNamara," Yale University Oral history project on the United Nations, February 1998, 41 p.

⁸³ Bernard Constantin, "Activity Report (March 1993)," April 8, 1993, S-0794-0028-03 (UNTAC - 1/22.1. - Civil Administration - Public Security), United Nations Archive Geneva.

⁸⁴ McNamara and Sutterlin, "Interview with Dennis McNamara," 9.

The general elections thus became the most important priority for Akashi and his administrators as they were the vital precursor to a dignified UN withdrawal. The application of UN's 'Comprehensive Peacekeeping' mandate in Cambodia was trimmed in these months to meet its minimum requirements. To the disgruntlement of McNamara, his component was cast to the wayside as the administrators in Phnom Penh readied the country for the first general elections since 1966.

Chapter 3: “Free and Fair”

UNTAC’s Electoral Component and its preparations for the May 1993 Elections

“Cambodians live in rhythm with the rains. The monsoons begin in May and continue to drench the country until October.”

— International Observers Handbook, May 1993⁸⁵

During late April 1993, just less than a month away from the elections, international election observers started to trickle into the country. Upon arrival, each observer was greeted by a letter written by Reginald H.F. Austin, Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) of UNTAC: “Dear Observer, welcome to Cambodia. The country is entering the final, and perhaps decisive, transitional phase with the preparations for the first truly multi-party election after decades of violence and social and economic dislocation.”⁸⁶ Austin’s letter to international election observers is a unique window into how UN officials in Cambodia presented themselves and their work of the past year to the world. While noting the gravity of the upcoming elections, Austin qualifies UNTAC’s performance in a task seen as essential to the success of the Administration’s mission in Cambodia: “The primary purpose of UNTAC’s mission is to enable the Cambodian people to elect a Constitutional Assembly...In order to break the perennial cycle of violence, it is essential that the people of Cambodia be given the first opportunity (limited as it might be in its ability to offer the

⁸⁵ Electoral Component, “Handbook: Welcome International Observers” (UNARMS, May 1993), S-0794-0030-05 (UNTAC – 1/23.1 Electoral - General - Electoral Component - Part 3), United Nations Archive New York.

⁸⁶ Reginald Austin, “International Election Observer Welcome Letter” (UNARMS, April 19, 1993), S-0794-0030-05, United Nations Archive.

ideal conditions for a free and fair election) to put in power a government which will have some legitimacy.” Here, Austin, a Zimbabwean academic and UN official specializing in electoral support,⁸⁷ highlights how vital the successful running of the May 1993 elections was to UNTAC fulfilling its mandate. Failure meant not only a colossal humiliation for the United Nations during its inaugural flagship mission of the post-Cold War era and discrediting of Secretary General’s Boutros Boutros-Ghali’s *An Agenda for Peace*, but also the certainty—in eyes of UNTAC administrators—of widespread political upheaval and violence. Austin would write retrospectively in 1998: “This is very difficult to achieve in a situation where a civil war is still raging, violence is endemic, none of the parties has any real experience of a democratic election, and the management of this entire intimate, dangerous process is in the hands of total strangers. This was the case with UNTAC.”⁸⁸

The May 1993 elections represented the Administration’s most difficult and essential task: to translate decades of armed conflict into a stable democratic order. Immense logistical hurdles laid before the UN Electoral Component staff, determined by Cambodia’s remote geography, poor-to-no infrastructure, and an unpredictable security environment. In addition, the Electoral Component faced much of the same structural problems that afflicted much of the other aspects of the UN presence in Cambodia [as described in the previous chapter]. However, this chapter seeks

⁸⁷ Outside of UNTAC, Austin served as Director of the Electoral Division of United Nations Observer Mission in South Africa (UNOMSA) 1992-1994 and as Chief of Electoral Unit of United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) in 2003.

⁸⁸ Reginald Austin, “UN Peacekeeping: Cosmetic or Comprehensive?,” in *Past Imperfect, Future UNCertain: The United Nations at Fifty*, ed. Ramesh Chandra Thakur (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire : New York: MacMillan Press ; St. Martin’s Press, 1998), 75.

to highlight the special nature of UNTAC's electoral mission that made it unlike any other of its various aspects. Instead of 'peacekeeping' (the cantonment and disarmament of military factions, ordinance disposal, refugee repatriation, and the building of administrative structures), the Electoral Component was seen as UNTAC's primary 'peacebuilding' effort to—in the words of the Paris Peace Agreement preamble—"promote national reconciliation and to ensure the exercise of the right to self-determination of the Cambodian people through free and fair elections."⁸⁹

However, the drafters of the Paris Agreement, mostly diplomatic staff of the Security Council Permanent Five, did not go to Cambodia; the reality of facilitating the election was left to the administrators of UNTAC's Electoral Component, headed by Professor Austin,⁹⁰ and the thousands of local volunteers and international staff members throughout Cambodia. The undertaking of peacebuilding through elections meant that the Electoral Component had to face pressing legal and political questions months before the first ballot was cast. Firstly, Cambodia's electoral law needed to be drafted in close cooperation with the Supreme National Council (SNC), translated into Khmer, publicized, and then enforced, which required not only the cooperation of political factions but also the ability of UNTAC authorities to hold them accountable. UN electoral administrators seeking to conduct 'free and fair elections' were at the same time constantly adjusting the electoral legal framework to meet the unforeseen realities of Cambodia's political economy. This was seen in how even after the promulgation of the "UN Electoral Law of

⁸⁹ United Nations, "Agreement on a Comprehensive Political Settlement of the Cambodia Conflict."

⁹⁰ Reginald H.F. Austin has been referred to by official UNTAC documents as "Professor Austin". Before becoming the Chief Electoral Officer of the UNTAC Electoral Component, he served as Dean of the Law Faculty at the University of Zimbabwe.

Cambodia” in August 1992, the legal document was continuously amended up to the very month of the elections, May 1993.⁹¹

As archived documents from the Electoral Component reveal, many of these amendments addressed questions of enfranchisement and stipulated what constituted ‘acceptable’ political activity by parties and individuals as the election neared. In essence, the contours of the Cambodian political life, who could vote, how to vote, and who could run for office, were being defined as the issues arose during the months and even days leading up to the elections. The piecemeal nature of how the election’s legal framework gradually adapted to meet circumstances originally not anticipated by the Authority’s framers point to the limitations of the mission’s mandate addressed by UN administrators with an almost improvisational quality. UNTAC may have eventually arrived at an electoral law that not only addressed the political concerns of the day but also was feasible to enforce. Yet, fluid legal boundaries of Cambodia’s 1993 elections as perceived by the country’s political actors arguably set a dangerous precedent for after the UN withdrawal, where the notion of ‘good governance’ trumped the rule of law and democratic order.

Shaping the Electorate (August–December 1992)

As UN electoral officials and the head administrators soon realized upon arrival, the framework for the elections established by the Paris Agreement, which held treaty status that

⁹¹ “United Nations Electoral Law for Cambodia, 1992,” May 10, 1993, https://aceproject.org/main/samples/em/emx_l003.pdf.

bound UNTAC officials, was insufficient in defining the Cambodian electorate and what constituted a “neutral political environment” the Administration was mandated to maintain.⁹² The two largest voter eligibility issues that Electoral Component officials were confronted with concerned the enfranchisement of ethnic Khmers from Kampuchea Krom region (“Lower Cambodia”), which lay within the boundaries of Socialist Republic of Vietnam, and the enfranchisement of Cambodian refugee populations throughout the world.

The question of Khmer Krom and refugee voter eligibility, like many of the legal issues surrounding the elections, was not anticipated by the framers of both UNTAC’s Mandate and the UN electoral law, which came into effect in August 1992 months before senior staff of the electoral component had even arrived in Cambodia. Even by December 8, 1992—the same day Cambodian political factions, FUNCINPEC and KPNLF, sent in papers raising the voter eligibility of Khmer Krom issue—the Electoral Component was still short on senior administrative staff.⁹³ In an interoffice memorandum, Chief Electoral Officer Reginald Austin noted the consequences of staff shortages amidst the continuous flow of petitions from Cambodian factions: “[the political parties] are increasingly expecting us to respond to their complains and at least show a serious concern to find a solution. [...] it would be a grossly false economy to think that avoiding costs on [personnel

⁹² Part III, United Nations, “Agreement on a Comprehensive Political Settlement of the Cambodia Conflict.”

⁹³ Electoral Component, “Time and Financial Implications for Registering Khmer Krom and Allowing Cambodians Abroad to Register in Their Countries of Residence” (UNARMS, December 17, 1992), 1, S-0794-0030-03 (UNTAC – 1/23.1 Electoral - General - Electoral Component - Part 1), United Nations Archive New York.

procurement] is the way to achieve success. [...] we must be able to respond credibly and rapidly to these problems if we are to avoid the Cambodian parties becoming cynical and uncooperative.”⁹⁴

Between December 1992 and January 1993, as the Electoral Component waited for the approval of twenty more Complaints, Compliance and Enforcement officers, Professor Austin and his existing staff tackled the Khmer Krom and refugee question due to the rising clamor from not just Cambodia’s political factions, but also the disenfranchised themselves.⁹⁵ Of the petitions, a handwritten December 23 letter from Khmer Krom detailed how they were denied voter registration due to being born in Vietnam, despite emigrating to Cambodia between 1954-1955 and being “recognized [as Cambodians] by *Sâmdach Preah* [“Lord Prince”] Norodom Sihanouk, by the Lon Non regime, by the Pol Pot regime, and even by the present government of Cambodia.” The petition further charges, “And when UNTAC came, UNTAC enacted a law that stripped [us] of their nationality and rights.”⁹⁶ The summarization of the letter into English from Khmer—which none of the Electoral Component’s senior staff could read—took over a week due to the lack of translators, and even left out key details concerning State of Cambodia (SOC) documents proving

⁹⁴ Reginald Austin, “Interoffice Memorandum: Complaints, Compliance and Enforcement Officers” (UNARMS, December 8, 1992), S-0794-0030-03 (UNTAC – 1/23.1 Electoral - General - Electoral Component - Part 1), United Nations Archive New York.

⁹⁵ Khen Chau, Sokha, and Thac Rin, “Request made by Khmers of Kampuchea Krom for their voter rights.” [Translated by Author] (UNARMS, December 23, 1992), S-0794-0030-03 (UNTAC – 1/23.1 Electoral - General - Electoral Component - Part 1), United Nations Archive New York; Kuon Khun-Neay, “Letter from Kuon Khun-Neay, President of the Association of Quebec-Cambodge, to Michael Maley, Deputy Chief Electoral Officer UNTAC” (UNARMS, October 7, 1992), S-0794-0030-03 (UNTAC – 1/23.1 Electoral - General - Electoral Component - Part 1), United Nations Archive New York; Walter Tucker, “Letter from Walter R. Tucker III, United States Representative, to Horatio Boneo, Director of UN Elections Assistance Unit.,” March 22, 1993, S-0794-0030-04 (UNTAC – 1/23.1 Electoral - General - Electoral Component - Part 2), United Nations Archive New York.

⁹⁶ Chau, Sokha, and Rin, “Request made by Khmers of Kampuchea Krom for their voter rights.”

their residency status. On the refugee issue, of the notable and forceful petitions, electoral officials received letters from US Congressman Walter R. Tucker, III who represented “thousands of expatriated and exiled Cambodian citizens around the Long Beach area,” and from the President of the Québec-Cambodge Association petitioning for polling places for the large Cambodian population in Montreal.⁹⁷

UNTAC’s unequipped, under-reinforced, and self-identified ‘unqualified’ electoral staff were thrust into a highly politicized debate of not just who could vote in May 1993, but what it meant to be “Cambodian”, “Khmer”, and “Khmer Krom” in the eyes of UN electoral law. In an internal report, the administrators candidly accepted the shaky ground they found themselves standing on: “It has been made clear, in the debate over the franchise, that the UN itself could become a party to the ethnic selection or categorization of people. In principle, the UN does not deal in racial or ethnic categories. Second, in practical terms, the UN cannot pretend to be qualified to distinguish people into Khmer Krom and non-Khmer Krom.”⁹⁸ The problematic legal definition of persons eligible for voter registration, which was based on Annex III of the Paris Peace Agreement, stated that only persons “born in Cambodia or is the child of a person born in Cambodia, will be eligible to vote in the election.”⁹⁹ It was neither a question of citizenship, nor a question of ethnicity, which excluded Khmer Krom. This was intentional, however, since refugees

⁹⁷ Tucker, “Letter from Walter R. Tucker III, United States Representative, to Horatio Boneo, Director of UN Elections Assistance Unit,” March 22, 1993; Khun-Neay, “Letter from Kuon Khun-Neay, President of the Association of Quebec-Cambodge, to Michael Maley, Deputy Chief Electoral Officer UNTAC.”

⁹⁸ Electoral Component, “Time and Financial Implications for Registering Khmer Krom and Allowing Cambodians Abroad to Register in Their Countries of Residence,” 2.

⁹⁹ Annex III United Nations, “Agreement on a Comprehensive Political Settlement of the Cambodia Conflict,” 19.

who fled the violence of the previous two decades were stateless, and Cambodia's ethnic minorities such as Chinese Cambodians, Cham, and Khmer Loeu ("Highland Khmers") could not fall under the 'Khmer' category.¹⁰⁰ Yet, what was not taken into account by the existing electoral law were the Vietnamese-born Khmer Krom émigrés living in Cambodia, conservatively estimated to 300,000 people, a number too large to ignore by UNTAC officials and the emergent political parties seeking to capture votes.

On the 22nd and 24th of December, meetings were held between senior Electoral Component staff, the head administrator SRSG Yasushi Akashi, and representatives of Cambodia's three major political parties to resolve these pressing legal and enfranchisement issues. During these meetings, it was agreed that the answer lay in amending the UN's electoral law to extend voter eligibility from birthright to residency to enfranchise Khmer Krom émigrés.¹⁰¹ However, this small adjustment faced a major obstacle, the approval of both the UN Secretary-General and the Security Council, since it revised a basic provision of the "Comprehensive Political Settlement" which held treaty status. Without approval from New York, UNTAC officials

¹⁰⁰ During Democratic Kampuchea, around fifty percent of Chinese Cambodians were killed under the Pol Pot regime between 1975–1979. While other groups were targeted by the Khmer Rouge in general classicide, this ethnic dimension to the DK regime is what demarks the period to fall into the legal definition of 'genocide' as defined by *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide*, which only considers national, ethnic, racial, or religious groups. The framers of the *Comprehensive Act* excluded ethnic categories especially considering the country's recent history in the persecution of ethnic minorities.

¹⁰¹ Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, "Notes from Meetings Held to Discuss the Electoral Law" (UNARMS, December 22, 1992), S-0794-0030-03 (UNTAC – 1/23.1 Electoral - General - Electoral Component - Part 1), United Nations Archive New York; Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, "Meeting with Representatives of FUNCINPEC, KPRLF and SOC. 24/XII/92" (UNARMS, December 24, 1992), S-0794-0030-03 (UNTAC – 1/23.1 Electoral - General - Electoral Component - Part 1), United Nations Archive New York.

risked violating international law. Yet, to the dismay of the political parties, electoral officials, Akashi, and the large cadre of potential voters; the Secretary-General rejected the change.¹⁰² For the May 1993 election, the hundreds of thousands of Khmer Krom residing in Cambodia were excluded from the Cambodian electorate, despite the intensive debate around the subject, the multiple reports, petitions, meetings, and internal support from the UNTAC senior staff. Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, in his “Third progress report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia”, he explained his reasoning for rejection the proposal:

[...] I have regretfully come to the conclusion that the extension of the franchise on purely ethnic grounds to person who were not born in Cambodia would not be consistent with the letter or the spirit of the Paris Agreements. Furthermore, at a time when the registration process is nearing completion, the printing of additional registration cards and other necessary documentation would create such delays that it would make it practically impossible to hold the elections in May 1993, in accordance with the time-table set by the Security Council.¹⁰³

Not only was New York concerned with the ethnic dimension the Khmer Krom question introduced, but the Secretary-General’s report reflects a worry over the “feasibility” of extending enfranchisement UNTAC officials expressed during the earlier debates.¹⁰⁴ The question of feasibility did not mean the UN Administration was incapable of procuring an extra 300,000 voter

¹⁰² Ramses Amer, “The Ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia: A Minority at Risk?,” *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 16, no. 2 (1994): 223; Nhan T. Vu, “The Holding of Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia: The Achievement of the United Nations’ Impossible Mission,” *Michigan Journal of International Law* 16, no. 4 (1995 1994): 1213.

¹⁰³ Boutros Boutros-Ghali, “Third Progress Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia.,” January 1993, 24 p.

¹⁰⁴ Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, “Meeting with Representatives of FUNCINPEC, KPNLF and SOC. 24/XII/92.”

registration cards. In fact, UNTAC officials concluded that SOC 1992 census data severely underestimated the population; additionally, Khmer Krom had been counted in the census as part of the Khmer ethnic group.¹⁰⁵ Thus, extra voter registration cards already being printed could cover the existing Khmer Krom population in Cambodia. Since the feasibility question only meant some adjustment to the electoral timeline, New York could not risk a failure to meet the May 1993 deadline and its rejection of Khmer Krom enfranchisement suggested that the Secretariat eagerly wished to avoid extending UNTAC's time in Cambodia.

The resolution to the Khmer Krom question reflected much larger dynamics that permeated not just the Electoral Component, but the Administration as a whole. Firstly, the rejection represented the strict deference the Administration had towards New York on issues concerning the Paris Agreement, illustrating how fundamental questions concerning UNTAC's mandate were not left to the primary signatories of the Comprehensive Agreement, Cambodia's political factions, but rather to the Security Council and the Secretary-General. As Boutros-Ghali's "Third Report" illustrates, this deference was part of a wider anxiety among the UN senior staff in Cambodia and New York regarding strict adherence to the May 1993 deadline was paramount. Of the limited scholarship surrounding the UN elections in Cambodia, Michael Sullivan contends that "Akashi and UNTAC's position expressed a more general feeling among those in the international

¹⁰⁵ Alf Regina, "SOC Estimates of the Population, by National or Ethnic Origin" (UNARMS, December 20, 1992), S-0794-0030-03 (UNTAC – 1/23.1 Electoral - General - Electoral Component - Part 1), United Nations Archive New York.

community engaged with the operation to push on, no matter what the cost.”¹⁰⁶ The cost meant the disenfranchisement of a historically marginalized ethnic grouping that constituted a significant—and undercounted—portion of the population. The “letter and spirit” of the Paris Agreements did not wholly seem to mean an adherence to the UN principles of not dealing in ethnic or racial categories, but—more significantly—sticking to a rigorous timeline and the eventual realization of an unobstructed withdrawal of UN forces from Cambodia.

The second dynamic the Khmer Krom question represented was a significant disconnect between electoral planning and the local sentiments about political participation. With the UN’s rejection of extending enfranchisement, the UN unwittingly exacerbated tensions between the Khmer population and the country’s ethnic minorities, especially the significant Vietnamese population that settled there in the past decade. In pursuit of a ‘neutral political environment’, UNTAC electoral officials found themselves aggravating deeply rooted ethnic tensions. By doing so, the Authority faced an increase of ethnic violence that translated into attacks on UNTAC personnel during in the final two months before elections. Confronted with a rapidly declining security situation and morale, the Administration pursued the running the elections with additional security that risked truncating voter participation.

¹⁰⁶ Michael Sullivan, *Cambodia Votes: Democracy, Authority and International Support for Elections 1993-2013* (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2016), 26.

Ethnic and Anti-UNTAC Violence (March–April 1993)

Anti-Vietnamese attitudes in Cambodian politics did not start during UNTAC. One can trace it back to the Vietnamese occupation of the country from 1979 to 1987. Further still, it would be reasonable to find the roots of ethnic tensions to Khmer Rouge racism during the DK regime, where nearly one hundred percent of Vietnamese living in Cambodia perished during the Cambodian genocide.¹⁰⁷ Under the Hanoi-backed protectorate People’s Democratic Kampuchea regime (1979-1989), Cambodia’s Vietnamese population steadily grew to comprise—based on SoC census data produced in 1992—200,000 individuals.¹⁰⁸ While around two percent of the total population, those born in Cambodia or who had proven permanent residence were enfranchised under Cambodian electoral law. This fact alone, in light of Khmer Krom disenfranchisement, provoked a significant increase in ethnic tensions and political violence in the months leading up to elections that threatened the credibility and security of the electoral process.

Kaing “Houng” Bunny, a Chinese-Cambodian from Pursat province, noted that in the beginning of 1993, as election preparations started to hasten, the Vietnamese students in her high school were attending classes less frequently:

¹⁰⁷ Ben Kiernan, “The Ethnic Element in the Cambodian Genocide.,” in *Ethnopolitical Warfare: Causes, Consequences, and Possible Solutions*. (Washington, DC, US: American Psychological Association, 2001), 83–91, <https://doi.org/10.1037/10396-006>.

¹⁰⁸ SoC census data was given to UNTAC officials for estimating how many voter registration cards to print in preparation for polling. These figures are from the SoC-provided report, though it may have severely undercounted the Vietnamese-speaking population in Cambodia. Some estimates in 1993 range the number to be around 300,000 individuals. See: “‘SoC’ Estimates of the Population, by National or Ethnic Origin” (UNARMS, December 30, 1992), S-0794-0030-03 (UNTAC – 1/23.1 Electoral - General - Electoral Component - Part 1), United Nations Archive New York. [Translated by Author]

It was rare to have a Vietnamese child in our school. They usually went to their own school in their own communities. [...] There were only two or three high school students who were [Vietnamese], but they stopped school as political campaigning was more and more. I think they were afraid of being beat up or killed. In other provinces, you know, lots of Vietnamese were being killed by—no one knows who killed them. [...] It could be Khmer Rouge or CPP. Mainly Khmer Rouge.¹⁰⁹

Until March 1993, there had been no major incidents of ethnic violence during the UNTAC period.¹¹⁰ However, attacks on Cambodia's Vietnamese populations increased significantly following Khmer Krom disenfranchisement in March 1993. On March 10, an attack on Phum Chong Kneas floating village located on the Tonle Sap lake caused the death of thirty-three Vietnamese villagers, and following an UNTAC investigation, it was determined that the perpetrators were Khmer Rouge operatives.¹¹¹ In a *Phnom Penh Post* article, a UN peacekeeping naval observer Capt. Gary Boyd was quoted saying, "About a month ago we heard a rumor that there would be an attack on the Vietnamese village so we did patrols that night but nothing came of it."¹¹² Seemingly, the UNTAC peacekeeping operation was unprepared for protecting the country's now vulnerable ethnic minorities, when its main task was to enforce a ceasefire between the organized militaries. Akashi's top military officer, General Sanderson, was quoted two days after the Chong Kneas attack saying, "We are here on a peacekeeping not...[an] internal security mission."¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ Kaing, "Interview with Kaing 'Houng' Bunny," interviewed and translated by author, (17 November 2022).

¹¹⁰ Civil Administration, "Civil Administration: Activity Report, March 1993."

¹¹¹ Amer, "The Ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia: A Minority at Risk?"

¹¹² Katrina Preach, "UNMOs Powerless to Protect Ethnic Vietnamese," *Phnom Penh Post*, March 26, 1993, Dow Jones Factiva.

¹¹³ Ibid.

As other attacks on the Vietnamese-speaking population occurred throughout March, Vietnamese-targeted ethnic violence was reaching hundreds of casualties, according to the Secretary-General's April report.¹¹⁴ The sharp increase of attacks resulted in an exodus of Vietnamese 'boat people' who "began to migrate from their homes towards the Vietnamese border, many of them by boat down the Tonle Sap and the Bassac River," noted the UNSG's "periodic report" to the Security Council. By April, over 20,000 Vietnamese had fled Cambodia into Vietnam through UNTAC-manned border crossings; it was quite possible that the true number was much higher.¹¹⁵

In terms of electoral planning, the increased ethnic violence in March was highly disruptive and demoralizing for UNTAC officials in Phnom Penh and provincial field offices. Accusations of the UN Authority being a Hanoi-backed administration conspiring with its former puppet government, Hun Sen's SoC, seemed to threaten not only the entire electoral project, but also the lives of UN personnel in Cambodia. April 1993 would prove to be UNTAC's most traumatic month, as anti-Vietnamese attacks by the Khmer Rouge translated into attacks directed towards the UN administration itself. Inklings of a potential attack on UNTAC personnel trickled into Akashi's office in early April when a memo from the Public Security office arrived, detailing an incident of handbill against Akashi anonymously posted on an UNTAC vehicle in a suburb of Phnom Penh. The handbill called the UN administration "*Yuon-TAC*"—*yuon* being a Khmer

¹¹⁴ Boutros Boutros-Ghali, "Fourth Progress Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia." ([New York] :. 1993-05-03: UN, May 3, 1993), S/25719, United Nations Digital Library, <http://digitallibrary.un.org/record/167113>.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 25.

derogatory term for Vietnamese people—and threatened violence against Akashi and UN personnel.¹¹⁶ UNTAC’s forceful denunciation of the ethnic violence and its condemnation of the Khmer Rouge elements behind it had placed it within the crosshairs of militant DK units.

Soon after Akashi’s office received the memo detailing the handbill, Khmer Rouge elements initiated a series of attacks against UNTAC’s civilian and military personnel in addition to their attempts to reignite an ethnic-cleansing campaign evocative of the DK era.¹¹⁷ Most of the UN deaths occurred in Siem Reap. Benny Widyono, its UN provincial director, recalled that the province “had the notorious distinction in many respects: it experiences the largest massacre of ethnic Vietnamese; it suffered the most attacks from Khmer Rouge and unidentified forces; it was the first province in which UNTAC officials were killed.”¹¹⁸ By mid-April, dozens of peacekeepers and civilian electoral and administrative officials were killed and the Khmer Rouge officially pulled out of the electoral process, closing their offices in Phnom Penh.¹¹⁹ With just over a month left before polling began, the months-long effort to prepare the country for elections seemed to be on the verge of collapse. The deaths of UNTAC personnel were shocking for the whole Administration, causing UN morale in the country to plummet. Dozens of electoral officers and civilian volunteers were terminating their contracts with the mission and leaving the country

¹¹⁶ “Very Important [Urgent]: Handbill against Mr. Akashi” (UNARMS, April 3, 1993), S-0794-0030-04 (UNTAC – 1/23.1 Electoral - General - Electoral Component - Part 2), United Nations Archive New York.

¹¹⁷ Some instances of violence against Vietnamese and UNTAC personnel were not always perpetrated by the Khmer Rouge. Some documents and oral accounts suggest that the ethnic killings and attacks were also perpetrated by SoC elements but this was never confirmed.

¹¹⁸ Widyono, *Dancing in Shadows*, 98.

¹¹⁹ “Elections to Go on despite More Khmer Rouge Attacks, U.N. Deaths,” *Agence France-Presse*, April 19, 1993, Dow Jones Factiva.

out of fear for their own safety.¹²⁰ The Administration's 'withdrawal mentality' was already materializing weeks before the elections.

Pre-Election Fears (April–May 1993)

On April 29, Chief Electoral Officer Austin sent a short memorandum to Special Representative Akashi informing him that for the next two weeks he would "be making personal visits to Electoral staff at Province and District level." His reason for his tour of the provinces in the final weeks before the elections, which were now scheduled for May 23, was "to see the situation on the ground and to check the morale of the local and international staff after the trauma of the past two weeks."¹²¹ Drastic augmentations were already being made to the security surrounding UNTAC's electoral preparations after the attacks of March and April as UN provincial electoral officers called for peacekeeper battalions to be reassigned to polling stations and counting centers.¹²² After the Khmer Rouge attacks of the previous two months, the fear of DK assaults during the polling period was pervasive throughout UNTAC's hierarchy. From Akashi to the lowly United Nations Volunteers (UNV) stationed remote provinces, the anxiety of an attack from Khmer Rouge guerillas loomed as election day neared.

¹²⁰ "30 UN Volunteers Quitting Their Work in Cambodia," *Agence France-Presse*, April 28, 1993, Dow Jones Factiva.

¹²¹ Reginald Austin, "Interoffice Memorandum: C.E.O. Review of Provincial and District Staff" (UNARMS, April 29, 1993), S-0794-0030-04 (UNTAC – 1/23.1 Electoral - General - Electoral Component - Part 2), United Nations Archive New York.

¹²² This document details the reassignment of the Bulgarian peacekeeping battalion in Kampong Speau province due to heightened Khmer Rouge activity. Two Bulgarian peacekeepers were killed in attacks in April. See: Reginald Austin, "Augmented Security: Kamponng Speu" (UNARMS, April 30, 1993), S-0794-0030-04 (UNTAC – 1/23.1 Electoral - General - Electoral Component - Part 2), United Nations Archive New York.

Sue Willis, a UNV from the United Kingdom stationed in Kampong Chhang province, spoke about the “[...] fear we all felt in the air during the last weeks of May.” When asked about pre-election anxieties, she noted:

It was a very scary time to be a volunteer. Some of us were leaving because our accommodations were not within the peacekeeping compounds so it was too frightening to be around when we heard about the attacks elsewhere. Being a volunteer meant that you felt very unprotected. [...] Our PEOs [Provincial Electoral Officers] and their staff who were not volunteers could be moved into the [peacekeeping] battalion compound, we had to stay with our hosts and in our guest houses.¹²³

The disparities in treatment between those employed directly with the Electoral Component, such as PEOs and district-level officers (DEs), and the UNV was also apparent in the safety equipment they were provided. Professor Austin complained to Hocine Medili, the Director of Administration, that there were not enough flak jackets and helmets to be distributed to UNVs in the case of an attack, leaving “leaving local [electoral] UNTAC staff possibly feeling... comparatively ‘naked.’”¹²⁴

A pre-election report sent to Special Representative Akashi by Raoul Jennar, PEO of Kampong Chhnang,¹²⁵ shows how fears of Khmer Rouge attacks and the subsequent changes to electoral security protocols affected the number of polling stations. With a limited number of peacekeepers appropriated for election security, not all voting sites could be adequately protected,

¹²³ Sue Willis, Interview with Sue Willis, interview by Author, November 20, 2022.

¹²⁴ Austin, Reginald, “Interoffice Memorandum: Flak Jackets and Helmets and Radios” (UNARMS, May 13, 1993), S-0794-0030-05 (UNTAC – 1/23.1 Electoral - General - Electoral Component - Part 3), United Nations Archive New York.

¹²⁵ Jennar is the same PEO Sue Willis was referring to in her interview. While Willis did not refer to the PEO by name, both were deployed to Kampong Chhnang in May 1993.

especially “satellite stations” that were planned to be deployed in remote villages.¹²⁶ In his report, Jennar noted the major shifts in DK presence in the province since the beginning of the mission: “Last fall, we were still travelling freely during registrations and only a few communes and villages were closed [due to Khmer Rouge harassment]... Now, NADK [Khmer Rouge regular army units] are in 15 of the 16 districts.”¹²⁷ Thus, he reluctantly directed his province electoral team to scale back the number of satellite polling stations in the districts, which he estimated would result in the expected voter turnout of 70 percent to decrease to 49 percent.¹²⁸ Jennar’s concerns were near universal within the UNTAC hierarchy. In all electoral documents produced around mid-May that were received by Akashi’s office, PEOs, UN provincial directors, and the UN leadership team in Phnom Penh expected turnout for the general elections to be severely truncated due to the security augmentations and the impression of potential DK attacks to suppress people from going to the polls. The UN’s desire to withdraw from the country after elections was so strong that low voter participation was deemed an acceptable outcome. It was better to have a low turnout than to risk the lives of UN electoral volunteers moving into NADK-controlled districts to setup satellite polling stations, even if it meant jeopardizing the democratic mandate of a post-UNTAC government. Despite the continued threat of widespread violence and low voter turnout, the

¹²⁶ Raoul Jennar, “May 13 Report to Akashi on Electoral Preparations in Kampong Chhnang Province” (UNARMS, May 13, 1992), S-0794-0030-05 (UNTAC – 1/23.1 Electoral - General - Electoral Component - Part 3), United Nations Archive New York.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

prevailing opinion of UNTAC's middle and upper management was "it is better to have a bad election than no election," as Jennar's report concluded.¹²⁹

The May Elections

When the five-day polling period began on May 23, UNTAC's civilian and military components vigilantly watched the country undergo its first democratic exercise since 1966. To their relieved surprise, there was no major NADK disruption and there was no significant evidence for Khmer Rouge-related voter suppression. In fact, an internal report within the Civil Administration confirmed that even some Khmer Rouge guerillas—despite the withdrawal of their faction from the electoral process—tricked into polling stations to cast their vote.¹³⁰ As the results arrived in UN-controlled counting centers across the country, the administrators cautiously realized the resounding success of the election. Jennar's projected 49 percent voter turnout was completely incorrect. In reality, 89.5 percent of the country's 4.7 million registered voters casted their votes.¹³¹ The UN administrators were jubilant and relieved as the trauma of the past year gave way to a timely and dignified withdrawal. A day after polling closed, Special Representative Akashi announced to the Supreme National Council and the Security Council that "that the conduct of the elections was free and fair."¹³²

¹²⁹ Jennar, "May 13 Report to Akashi on Electoral Preparations in Kampong Chhnang Province."

¹³⁰ Susanne Wise, "Specialized Control – Activity Report for May 1993" (UNARMS, June 3, 1993), S-0794-0028-02 (UNTAC - 1/22.1. - Civil Administration - General - Part 2), United Nations Archive Geneva.

¹³¹ Widyono, *Dancing in Shadows*, 124.

¹³² Yasushi Akashi, "Statement by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Cambodia at the Supreme National Council of Cambodia," May 29, 1993, 2, S/25879, UN Digital Library.

The Administration's surprise at the elections success not only speaks to the serious overestimation of the risk of NADK insurgency, but also represented a misjudgment of the Cambodian electorate's collective courage. On May 28, Human Rights Director McNamara noted in the two weeks before polling "were accompanied by an unacceptable level of violence, intimidation and harassment," and there was "every indication" that it would continue into the polling period.¹³³ The violence of March and April suggested to UNTAC's leadership that the worst of the disruption and the killings was to arrive during the polling period. The fear of election-day violence gripped the entire Administration. Perhaps out of an abundance of caution, the civilian components discounted signs of the nascent enthusiasm of the Cambodian electorate to participate the democratic process that foreshadowed both the high turnout rate and the peaceful nature of the election.

Within the multitudes of documents received by the central office of the Electoral Component in Phnom Penh during April, there were several instances where signs of the electorate's eagerness fell by the wayside and failed to be circulated with UNTAC's senior staff. The largest indication of administrative neglect, especially when the entirety of the mission's leadership could not read, write, or speak Khmer, is when documents and reports were left untranslated. In one case, an untranslated handbill created by the Action for Democracy Party, a small Phnom-Penh based party, that found its way to the Electoral Component's Phnom Penh

¹³³ Dennis McNamara, "Interoffice Memorandum: Assessment of the Elections" (UNARMS, May 28, 1993), S-0794-0030-05 (UNTAC – 1/23.1 Electoral - General - Electoral Component - Part 3), United Nations Archive New York.

office read “Intimidation, Terror or Assimilation in the hope to win elections have no justification and must be firmly condemned. Human life is more precious than a few seats at the Constituent Assembly!”¹³⁴ In another case, buried at the end of a forty-seven-page report on security augmentations for the electoral process in Kampot province, was a single paragraph on the large crowds attending district-level “civic education activities” that occasionally grew to over 2,000 people.¹³⁵ While April marked a period when the Electoral Component was preoccupied with preparing new security protocols for the polling period, it seemed that priority of the Electoral Component was directed away from measuring or even acknowledging the mood the population, who seemed increasingly eager to exercise their UN-mandated right to vote.

These instances of the Electoral Component’s discounting of the electorate’s enthusiasm continued into the month and days before polling opened. In another case of an untranslated Khmer language document, Akashi’s office received a handwritten letter from a Phnom Penh resident suggesting several slogans to displayed in polling stations. The suggested slogans were primarily aimed at reinforcing ballot secrecy: “You have the full right to vote freely and very secretly for any political party![...] Nobody and no equipment will know your vote! [...] If any political asked:

¹³⁴ [Translated by author] “Handbill by the Action for Democracy and Development Party: ‘A Call To Our Compatriots’” (UNARMS, n.d.), S-0794-0030-05 (UNTAC – 1/23.1 Electoral - General - Electoral Component - Part 3), United Nations Archive New York.

¹³⁵ Osman Hassan, “Weekly Report for the Period from Monday 29 March 4 April 1993” (UNARMS, April 4, 1993), 46, S-0794-0030-04 (UNTAC – 1/23.1 Electoral - General - Electoral Component - Part 2), United Nations Archive New York.

what political party did you vote for? You must reply: I voted for your party.”¹³⁶ Since it was left untranslated, there is a high probability that the letter never reached Akashi. If it did, Akashi could not have understood it. In one sense, it represents a missed opportunity of the Electoral Component to realize the importance of conveying ballot secrecy to the public. In a broader sense, the letter epitomizes the chronic disconnect the Administration had with the people it was governing.

¹³⁶ Leng Tek Seng, “Khmer-Language Handwritten Letter from Leng Tek Seng to Yasushi Akashi” (UNARMS, May 21, 1993), S-0794-0030-05 (UNTAC – 1/23.1 Electoral - General - Electoral Component - Part 3), United Nations Archive New York.

Epilogue

After elections, UNTAC prepared for departure. On 3 June, Sihanouk proclaimed the creation of a “Provisional Government” after striking a power sharing agreement between Prince Ranariddh’s (Sihanouk’s son) FUNCINPEC and Hun Sen’s Cambodian People’s Party (CCP), both of whom agreed to be Sihanouk’s co-vice presidents. The move was conducted behind UNTAC’s back, and Akashi refused to recognize the government but applauded Sihanouk’s initiative in unifying Cambodia’s two largest political parties by share of the vote.¹³⁷ It seemed like Cambodia had finally found a government of national unity, which now had the added benefit of a democratic mandate. Shortly after, the newly elected National Assembly proclaimed the country a constitutional monarchy, with Sihanouk as king of Cambodia and Ranariddh and Hun Sen as co-prime ministers. For the remainder of the transitional period, UNTAC gradually withdrew during the summer of 1993, with its primary task being helping the National Assembly draft its new constitution undertaken by a team of UN lawyers and legal experts in Phnom Penh. After what it deemed to be an election that was “the fairest that has been conducted in this region in recent times,” UNTAC’s primary objective had been accomplished; it had completed its mandate.

This paper has largely been an attempt of tracing the mentality and approaches of the UN administrators of Cambodia back in time to UNTAC’s prehistory and through their brief but daunting time as the caretakers of the country. By connecting UNTAC’s mandate to its post-

¹³⁷ Widyono, *Dancing in Shadows*, 125.

colonial precursors, we can locate the institutional habits constructed Organization's past endeavors in how it administrated Cambodia. In doing so, we approach a better explanation for not only the decisions made by Akashi and his team of administrators, but also for the miscalculations of the mission and the chronic cloistering away from local participation.

Using archival documents that have only been made available in the last three years, a deeper look into the UN Administration of Cambodia is possible, where we are able to track the spirit and morale of the Authority through the handful of months it was allocated to fulfill its mandate. We find that the initial enthusiasm forged in the spirit of 1990s transformed into frustration, fears, and the eventual relief felt in May 1993. In that journey, UNTAC is revealed to be more than a giant administrative bureaucracy, but a dynamic and unevenly reactive creature of administration with its constituent parts often competing for resources and priority.

UNTAC represented not only change for Cambodia, but also change within the United Nations as it sought to redefine itself in a new geopolitical climate. For many Cambodians, it was a reprieve between two tumultuous sagas of modern Cambodian politics and a second chance at self-determination. For its administrators, it was a delicate dance of governance where the hopes of a suffered people hung in the balance.

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