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Post Conflict Peace Building: A Cambodian Case Study

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- ✚ participate and share ideas in domestic, regional and international forums, workshops and conferences;
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Abstract:

Cambodia is perhaps one of the successful stories in post conflict peace building in the region and the world. With a long and difficult way to build a complete peaceful country out of war-torn society, we can share our experiences in peace building. There are too much to say on the up and down in peace building in Cambodia. The author tried his best to summarize some of the main points, especially lessons learned from Cambodia's post conflict peace building.

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Post Conflict Peace Building: A Cambodian Case Study

Introduction

Cambodia is a small and poor country. After a long suffering of war and political strife, the country has achieved peace and stability only for the past 8 years after the Khmer Rouge rebel group completely dismantled in 1998. With enough sufferings caused by war and conflicts, Cambodians no longer wants war and now we only want to live in peace and stability. I strongly believe that Peace and stability is the fundamental base for development and prosperity. Therefore, we would like to see that our region and the entire world have peace and stability.

Cambodia is perhaps one of the successful stories in post conflict peace building in the region and the world. With a long and difficult way to build a complete peaceful country out of war-torn society, we can share our experiences in peace building. There are too much to say on the up and down in peace building in Cambodia. However, I try my best to summarize some of the main points for Cambodia's post conflict peace building:

Cambodia Historical Background

1953-1970 (Period of Sangkum Reas Niyum)

Following Cambodia's independence from France, King Norodom Sihanouk moved to establish friendly relations with many countries. Cambodia did not join SEATO and ASEAN, at the time that was during the Vietnam War. It was the period of Confrontation between Communism and the Free World. The Soviet Unions represented the communist block, the Free World was headed by the United States, Great Britain, Australia, Japan, South Korea and the ASEAN countries.

King Norodom Sihanouk, after securing independent from France which was Cambodia protectorate for almost 100 years, was very skillful and astute in trying to preserve Cambodia's Independence and in safeguarding Cambodia's territorial integrity and sovereignty by walking on a tight rope. Cambodia join the United Nation and was enjoying diplomatic relations with countries and obtaining foreign assistances to modernize the newly independent country.

For 17 years, from 1953 to 1970, Prince Norodom Sihanouk was the key architect of Cambodia's foreign policy couple with a policy of Neutrality and was a member of the Non-Align Movement, in which Prince Sihanouk was one of their founding fathers. Cambodia refused to join ASEAN during this period. It is to be noted that ASEAN was established in 1967 by Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Philippines and Thailand.

By the late 1960s Cambodia faced difficult times, domestically and externally, which were the direct and indirect results of the War in neighboring country, Vietnam. Prince Norodom Sihanouk was overthrown in a Coup d'Etat, organized by General Lon Nol, then Prime Minister and Prince Sisowath Sirimatak, his cousin, on 18th March 1970.

The newly formed regime, the Khmer Republic backed by the United States, opposed the presence of the Vietcong and North Vietnamese troops which used Cambodian territory as their sanctuary and supplied routes.

This marks the end of Cambodia's neutrality which was the chef d'oeuvre of Prince Norodom Sihanouk.

1970-1975 (The Khmer Republic)

During this period, Cambodia was largely preoccupied with the US intense bombings, internal politics of power struggles and riots, the fighting with the Khmer Rouge and the spillover of the war in Vietnam.

While maintaining diplomatic relations with a number of countries, Cambodia was leaning too heavily on the United States. The Country was largely dependent on US assistances for war and its economy.

Cambodia foreign policy during this period was chaotic, obscure and confused. Lon Nol was changing Cambodia's Foreign Policy from neutrality and non-alignment to a policy of pro United States and the west.

1975-1979 (Democratic Kampuchea, Khmer Rouge)

Phnom Penh was capture by the Khmer Rouge on 17th April 1975. The country was named Democratic Kampuchea. The Khmer Rouge immediately adopted an isolationist Foreign Policy. Whilst some Embassies were allowed to stay in the Capital Phnom Penh, other Foreign mission was forced to shut down completely and evacuated their staff, without delay, out of the country mainly by road to Thailand.

Cambodia under Democratic Kampuchea regime did not formulate any constructive Foreign Policy. It had almost cut itself off from the region and the rest of the world except China and a few Eastern Europe communist countries. The Foreign Policy, if there were any, could be characterized as Anti- Foreigners from the very beginning until it was ousted.

Democratic Kampuchea, Khmer Rouge, under Pol Pot, Ieng Sary was too heavily relied on Beijing for supports. It's Anti- US and Anti- Westerners attitude were conducive to its isolationist Foreign Policy which ended up with the Vietnamese invasion in January 1979.

1979-1993 (People's Republic of Kampuchea, PRK)

Democratic Kampuchea was ousted by the Vietnamese troupes and the Revolutionary Army of Kampuchea. Cambodia was then known as the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK). The Khmer Rouge were forced to flee in front of the advanced Vietnamese tropes and were quickly set itself up in the areas along the Thai- Cambodia borders in the western parts of the country.

The period immediately following January 1979 was a period of bloodied war and destruction of Cambodia in an effort by the resistance groups including the Khmer Rouge to force the Vietnamese Army to withdraw from Cambodia. The Coalition Government headed by Prince Norodom Sihanouk, President of FUNCINPEC (United Front for an Independent, Peaceful and Cooperative Cambodia) was formed in Kuala Lumpur in 1982 with the participation of the Khmer Rouge (DK), Khiev Samphan and the KPNLE (Khmer People National Liberation Front) headed by Son Sann. China, The United States, France, Germany, Great Britain and the countries of ASEAN were backing the Coalition Government known as CGDK (Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea). The CGDK was the legal representative of Cambodia at the United Nations. The presence of Vietnamese troupes in Cambodia was regarded as the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia. There was a call for the Vietnamese to withdraw its troupes. This was a period of the PRK international isolation and the regime was illegal and was not recognized by the UN.

This was the period of intense international lobbying from both sides of the conflict to gain international recognition, especially from the PRK which later was known as SOC (State of Cambodian). There was not much of a Foreign Policy in the true sense of the words. The period coincided with the end of the Cold War Politics to some extent, influenced greatly the negotiation to end the conflicts in Cambodia.

The negotiation started in 1988 with the meeting between Prince Norodom Sihanouk, President of the CGDK and HE. Hun Sen, Prime Minister of the SOC, in France. It took three years of intense negotiations and international lobbying to come to an Agreement on the Comprehensive Political Settlement of the Cambodian Conflicts which was signed in Paris on 23rd October 1991. The Agreement paved the way for the setting up of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia better known as UNTAC.

A General Election, organized and supervised by the United Nations, was conducted in May 1993. A new coalition Government was formed afterward which marked the beginning of the new era of the Second Kingdom of Cambodia.

1993-2006 (The Second Kingdom of Cambodia)

The end of the conflicts was marked by the organization of the General Election by the United Nations in May 1993. The Coalition Government was found, first as the provisional Government then the Royal Government (RGC) headed by two Prime Ministers, Prime Norodom Ranariddh, first Prime Minister and HE. Hun Sen, second Prime Minister.

Prime Norodom Sihanouk, President of the Supreme National Council was crowned for the second times, King of Cambodia by the new 120 seats Parliament comprising 58 members from FUNCUNPEC, 51 from CPP, 10 from the FNLPK and 1 from the MOULINAKA party. The RGC was struggling to gain international recognition and assistance to rebuild the devastated country, after almost three decades of wars and conflicts. Cambodia took its seats at the UN and reemerged in the world stage once again. The new Foreign Policy was shaped by the needs of Cambodia to be a normal State by rejoining the various International Organizations, establishing Diplomatic Relations and opening many embassies in many countries. One can also see an increasing numbers of foreign Missions and Representatives of UN missions like UNDP, The Mekong River Commissions, International Banks like IMF, ADB, the World Bank and many other private organizations and NGO just to name a few.

Joining ASEAN was the highlight of the new Foreign Policy. Cambodia was admitted as ASEAN Member Observer in July 1995 in Brunei Darussalam. It took another four years for Cambodia to become full number in 1999 in Hanoi due to the event of 5-6 July 1997. For ASEAN, Cambodia was the tenth member. This was the dream of the forefathers of ASEAN, when this organization was created in 1967.

It is to be noted that Cambodia was a full member of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) from 1995 when it became Member Observer. Joining ASEAN was a prestige but also was a burden, which in a sense, would act as a stick for Cambodia to perform better economically. Cambodia had to join ASEAN Free Trade Areas (AFTA) and now member of the world Trade Organization (WTO).

Post Conflict –Peace Building

Having gone through the almost half a century of Cambodia history, lets look at the case in relation to conflict prevention and conflict resolution which relate to Cambodia. Cambodia is always seen as a perfect case for the study of the subject in discussion. The notion of conflict prevention is quite new to the region, if not the world.

Let' start with the ASEAN way. This is a set of principles as stipulated in the Treaty of Amity & Cooperation, treaty signed by all ASEAN member states, before joining the Organization. It encompasses norms of interstate conducts and mode of cooperation and decision making. It covers the most fundamental principles that preserve and enhance national sovereignty in international relations such as equality of state, respect for national sovereignty and territorial boundaries, non-interference in the domestic affairs of other States and Peaceful settlement of disputes and non use of forces.

Track 2 diplomacy, as known in ASEAN, is regarded as a conflicts prevention measure. It is generally believed that parties to the disputes are less likely to go to war as long as dialogues exist.

The ARF (ASEAN Regional Forum) driving by ASEAN, including CBM (Confidence Building Measures), is one of the key architects for conflict prevention and eventually conflict resolution.

In the Cambodia example there were no case for conflict prevention in the 70's when was stated during the Vietnam War. However one saw instead conflict resolution at work which I should discuss later in this paper. Instead we saw the involvement of ASEAN in the aftermath of the 5-6 July 1997 faction fighting in Phnom Penh involving the force loyal to the then First Prime Minister Prince Norodom Ranariddh and the force loyal to the then Second Prime Minister Hun Sen. Cambodia was at the brink of a civil war again after the Paris Peace Agreement of 1991 and the United Nation organized election in 1993.

ASEAN was requested to intervene in restoring political stability of Cambodia. The Troika was formed comprising Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand. One may argue that it was against the principle of non- interference in the Domestic affairs of a State, in this case it was Cambodia, Member Observer of ASEAN. The answer was that ASEAN acted that way at the request of the then foreign Minister of Cambodia, myself at the 30th Anniversary of ASEAN in Kula Lumpur in late July 1997. ASEAN could mediate and contribute to the solution, marked by the return of Prince Norodom Ranarith to Phnom Penh and the organization of the general election in 1998. It is believed that this constitute the basis for the present peace and stability today.

There are many other cases of conflict prevention and resolution in the Region apart from Cambodia. The Philippines over Sabah; the Indonesian- Singapore crisis in 1968 which was sparked by the execution of Indonesian marines; the disputes over the Spratleys, Netuna), just to mention a few jargons. It is all involved dialogues between States, bilaterally or and multilaterally to prevent the use of forces and to try to bring it into the open so that solutions or non solution could be found. Hopefully a win-win solution could be found. ARF is the forum where member states and the dialogues partners could discuss and find solutions to the conflicts in ASEAN and in the region.

For Cambodia the war continues over three decades, from the 1970's to the 1990's. One may argue that it was the direct results of the Vietnam War and the Cold war era. During the Post Cold war era, everyone expects that Cambodia would be able to manage its own affairs and avoid the mistakes of the past. The Khmer Rouge are too tired of the war which completely destroyed their country: the Lon Nol, Khmer Republic era, the Khmer Rouge era, the Vietnamese occupation and the resistance era. They look forward to a bright future. However hiccups occurred like the 5-6 July 1997 bloody battle in the middle of Phnom Penh.

On hindsight some people regarded the event as the war to end all wars in Cambodia. One may note that dialogue broke down between the Two Prime Ministers before the bloody battle began.

Conclusion

On a brighter note Cambodians now, enjoy peace and stability as one could expect from a war-torn country.

The key factors in my view were:

- the strong will Cambodians to have peace.
- the will to combat poverty.
- the will to bring Democracy and the respect of Human Rights to Cambodia.
- The will to bring Cambodia up to speed with the region and the world.
- The valuable assistance and participation from peace-loving countries and people around the world

Peace- Stability and Development go hand and hand. Building peace is a condition sine-qua-non for a country to get out of poverty and to move positive forward. We also believe that one more quite importance factor for Cambodia is Democracy. In the term of Democracy and the respect of Human Rights, Cambodia still have some way to get yet.

Conflict-Resolution-Peace building, reconciliations, Cambodia has seen it all, I cannot emphasized anymore, except to point out as a way of concluding this paper that Cambodia has come a long way. I just wish to mention a few challenges as food for thoughts.

Cambodia emerges:

- ▶ from war and conflicts to peace and stability
- ▶ from poverty eradication through rebuilding and economic development
- ▶ from isolation to integration to the region and to the world
- ▶ from a closed society to an open society
- ▶ from planned economy to free market economy
- ▶ from communist absolute state to democratic state or Constitutional Monarchy

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