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Conflict Resolution in Cambodia

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Abstract

Following the fall of Khmer Rouge regime in January 1979, Cambodia's civil conflict had not been ended. Efforts to resolve the conflict in Cambodia range from external intervention to internal actors. The United Nations' intervention failed to secure full peace and unity in this country because the Khmer Rouge boycotted the UN-sponsored election in 1993 and continued military attack against the de jure government. In the late 1998, the prolonged armed conflicts were successfully resolved by the Cambodian government's so-called 'win-win' policy, which dismantled the Khmer Rouge's last stronghold without bloodshed and integrated the separatists into the mainstream society.

This paper analyzes the nature of the armed conflicts in Cambodia from 1979 to 1998 and investigates intervention strategies contributing to resolution of conflict in this country. It consists of three important sections. The first part examines the origin of the conflict based on inherent, contingent and interactionist approaches. The second piece reviews the dynamics of the conflict based on source of hatred and alienation, intractability, opportunity-capability-volition, mediation, and leadership change. The final section investigates the local intervention, known as 'win-win' policy, taking into account reconciliation, human needs and shared identity theories.

Although external intervention did not indeed fully secure peace on the ground, it contributed to transformation of the conflict and formation of a democratically-elected coalition government. Recognizing that the external intervention's effort was hampered by the international actors' interests in the negotiation outcomes, internal actors devise a so-called 'win-win' policy, putting an end to the long-standing conflict through amnesty and integration of some former Khmer Rouge leaders and soldiers into the mainstream society. The implication of Cambodia's peace-making experience through its unique 'win-win' policy could be a model of diplomatic endeavors to deal with conflicts in other countries.

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Conflict Resolution in Cambodia

I. Introduction

In March 1970, a US-supported group, led by General Lon Nol, launched a coup against Prince Norodom Sihanouk, a hero for Cambodia's independence from France in 1953. An armed element, called the "Khmer Rouge", was formed and overthrew Lon Nol's rule in April 1975. When coming to power, the Khmer Rouge carried out genocide, resulting in death of 1.7 million people. However, this genocidal regime was toppled in January 1979 by a liberation movement, later known as the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK), with the support of Vietnam. Nevertheless, the conflict remained protracted because the PRK continued to be militarily attacked by three joint factions, comprised of the Khmer Rouge; Lon Nol's group, called Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPNFL); and Sihanouk-founded group, called FUNCINPEC. (Findlay, 1995)

In an attempt to address Cambodia's conflict in the late 1980s, the United Nations (UN) played an important role in brokering several negotiations which eventually led to the Paris Peace Agreement (PPA), aiming to settle the conflict in a peaceful and democratic fashion. The agreement was signed by the four warring parties on 23 October 1991. While the UN's involvement deserved a credit, it failed to secure full peace and unity in this country because the Khmer Rouge boycotted the UN-sponsored election in 1993 and continued launching military attack against the de jure government. To deal with the prolonged armed conflict, the Cambodian government initiated the so-called "win-win" policy, which successfully dismantled the Khmer Rouge's last stronghold without bloodshed and integrated the separatists into the mainstream society in late 1998.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the nature of the armed conflict in Cambodia from 1979 to 1998 and to investigate intervention strategies contributing to resolution of conflict in this country.

This research is of critical importance for two main reasons. First, while attention is often paid to external actors to intervene in conflict, this study will examine the significance of the local actors in addressing their differences through negotiation without external intervention. The comprehensive peace agreement in 1991, concluded with the

third party's mediation, did not secure Cambodian peace and security on the ground although it was negotiated to have this effect. Second, the implication of Cambodia's peace-making experience could be a model of diplomatic endeavors to deal with other international conflicts.

II. Conflict Parties

Conflict from 1979 to 1993

In this period, there were four primary parties to the conflict. The PRK, a communist regime, controlled the large part of the country after having ousted the Khmer Rouge. The other three groups, the Khmer Rouge, FUNCINPEC and KPNLF, formed an alliance, known as the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK) (Peou, 1997).

These contending parties labelled the conflict in Cambodia differently. The CGDK claimed that they fought Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia and the long stay presence of Vietnamese troops in Cambodia upon the fall of the Khmer Rouge's rule (Peou, 1997). The leader of FUNCINPEC argued, "The war in Cambodia exists only and will be pursued between Cambodia and Vietnam, with Vietnam as the aggressor and Cambodia as the aggrieved party" (Peou, 1997). The CGDK used this framing to legitimize its attacks against the communist PRK and to gain Western bloc's support during the Cold War era. In contrast, the PRK held a view that the war was between the Cambodian people and the Khmer Rouge. The presence of Vietnamese troops in Cambodia was simply to liberate Cambodian people from the genocide (Peou, 1997). The PRK's framing aimed to appeal to the international community to end its support to the Khmer Rouge, to lift economic sanctions against the PRK, and to provide support to the PRK to restore socio-economic development in Cambodia.

Secondary stakeholders were also identified. Among them was Vietnam, assisting the PRK to overthrow and hold off the Khmer Rouge. In addition, Soviet Union was the PRK's supporter (Roberts, 2002). On the opposite side, key allies to the CGDK were China, the United States (US) and some members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). They pushed for Vietnamese troops' complete withdrawal from Cambodia. According to Roberts (2002) and Brown (1991), China and the US opposed any attempt

to bring the Khmer Rouge to trial over its genocidal acts, and demanded the Khmer Rouge's inclusion in the peace process. This condition resulted from the ideological confrontation between the US and Soviet Union for their sphere of influence during the Cold War.

From 1979 to 1985, the PRK and CGDK had no interest in resolving the conflict peacefully because of their conviction they were able to defeat each other (Peou, 1997).

Conflict from 1993 to 1998

In this period, there were only two major actors: the de jure government, formed by three signatories of the PPA in the wake of the UN-organized election in 1993, and the Khmer Rouge, the belligerent party boycotting the election and launching guerrilla war against the de jure coalition government (Ouch, 2008).

Another external stakeholder was identified. Thailand not only offered hospitality to some Khmer Rouge leaders but also allowed the transit of the Khmer Rouge's weapons in Thailand in order to attack the legitimate government of Cambodia. Historical animosity pushed Thailand to harbor this guerilla group. (Markar, 2009)

Unable to defeat each other, they tacitly started negotiations with a view to integrating the Khmer Rouge into the government. However, the Khmer Rouge demanded shared power in the ruling without pre-conditions. Fighting went on in certain parts of the country while they were attempting to negotiate for a political settlement (Um, 1995).

III. Analysis of Conflict Origin

According to Tidwell (1998), three approaches explain conflict origin. First, inherency theory underlines that humans' aggression is biological. Second, contingency theory emphasizes that the aggression results from external factors. Third, interactionist theory underscores both innate and external factors, which brings about the aggression.

The conflicts in Cambodia from 1979 to 1998 can be explicated with the three theories. From the inherency perspective, the Khmer Rouge's desire to regain power pushed them to fight against the PRK. Furthermore, both FUNCIPPEC and KPNLF, non-communist groups, joined hands with the communist Khmer Rouge because of their quest for power. The CGDK justified its attack as defending Cambodian sovereignty against

Vietnam's invasion (Peou, 1997). On the contrary, the PRK had to take aggressive actions for self-defense with a view to retaining its power. From the contingency perspective, the eruption of conflicts in Cambodia resulted from the ideological confrontation during the Cold War era. When the communist bloc supported the PRK to hold off the Khmer Rouge, the Western countries ignoring the Khmer Rouge's genocide provided assistance to the CGDK to contain and defeat communism in Cambodia. From the interactionist perspective, the PRK had to engage in the warfare because it had to meet Cambodian people's needs for security and to prevent the return of genocidal regime. The need for self-determination could be used to explain the motivation of the CGDK, which proclaimed itself as an anti-Vietnamese movement (Ledgerwood, 2002).

IV. Dynamics of the Conflict

Source of Hatred and Alienation

Tidwell (1998) discusses a number of sources of 'hatred and alienation'. Among them is leaders' attempt to deflect attention from their own problems. The Khmer Rouge leaders, notorious for their genocide, launched military campaign against the PRK in the name of an anti-Vietnamese movement in order to restore its credibility. As a result, it gained military support of China, the US and ASEAN. (Ledgerwood, 2002)

In studying enemies, Tidwell (1998) claims, "The party being threatened must be able to justify their own actions in defense of threat. Rigidification, or the division of the world into two camps, requires that those who are not-self are something less than self. This requires the dehumanizing of the enemy." The CGDK labeled the PRK as Vietnamese puppet allowing Vietnam to occupy Cambodia (Ledgerwood, 2002). In contrast, the PRK named the Khmer Rouge as genocidal regime (Ouch, 2008).

Intractability

According to Gurkaynak and Dayton (2007), conflict is intractable in "situations where hostilities persist over long periods of time, where intensity fluctuates but a termination point is never reached, and where participants are caught in a negative sum relationship." The intractability results from several factors ranging from structural inequality to underdevelopment, from disputants' lack of contact to denial of human

needs (Gurkaynak and Dayton, 2007). From 1979 to 1985, the PRK and CGDK had no mutual communication. They signaled no willingness to negotiate because of their belief in using war to end a war. Furthermore, the PRK and Vietnam saw no reasons to launch any negotiation with the CGDK because they regarded Cambodian situation as ‘a fait accompli’. (Peou, 1997)

Based on Kriesberg (2008) and (2005), external interveners could contribute to the intractability of the conflict when military support and materials are provided to one or more sides engaging in conflict. At the height of the Cold War, the PRK was supported by Vietnam and the Soviet Union while the CGDK was backed by China, the US and some members of ASEAN (Peou, 1997). Thus, the assistance of their respective allies intensified and prolonged the conflict in Cambodia.

Opportunity, Capability and Volition

However, Kriesberg (2008) argues that changed social context could contribute to conflict transformation. He claims, “The end of the Cold War and external support for opposing sides contributed to transforming the lengthy and brutal civil wars in Central American countries and in Africa”. In the Cambodian context, an opportunity for conflict transformation was identified when both China and Russia had to pay more attention to their own internal problems than supporting their peripheral allies in Cambodia (Zasloff, 2002). As a result, the PRK and CGDK began their talks with a view to resolving the long-standing conflict. The first round was kicked off with a bilateral talk between the PRK and CGDK in 1987, followed by several other negotiations including multilateral dialogues until 1989 (Peou, 1997). In addition, the political settlement was brokered by the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, whose role is to maintain international peace and security (Zasloff, 2002). Despite several challenges confronted in the negotiation process, the four factional parties reached a deal, called Paris Peace Agreement (PPA) in late 1991. The above-said description explains the opportunity and capability to resolve the protracted conflict in Cambodia. However, three conditions must be met for successful conflict resolution: opportunity, capability and volition (Tidwell, 1998). The third element was missing in resolution of the Cambodian conflict. The Khmer Rouge did not exercise goodwill to implement the PPA. Apart from boycotting

the UN-supervised election in 1993, the Khmer Rouge occupied certain areas of the country along Cambodia-Thai border and launched guerrilla war against the de jure government (Ouch, 2008). Kriesberg (2005) regarded the failure to honor the peace agreement as ‘severe setback to transformation of intractable conflict’. In this sense, Cambodian conflict remained intractable despite external actors’ intervention.

Mediation

According to Hun (2006) and Ouch (2008), the United Nations, whose role was to supervise compliance with the PPA, took no action when one party failed to honor the agreement, and left this newly born kingdom immediately while the conflict remained protracted. Therefore, the question of mediation or external intervention should be examined. According to Tidwell (1998), mediator’s neutrality could affect conflict resolution process. What is expected from the neutrality is that “a third party has no vested interest in outcome of an intervention” (Tidwell, 1998). However, Tidwell (1998) argues, “No third party is neutral in every sense of the word.” This could result from the third party’s own values, different relationship to parties to conflict and different institutional affiliations. According to Roberts (2002) and Brown (1991), both China and the US rejected any attempt to bring the Khmer Rouge to trial and demanded the Khmer Rouge’s role in the peace process. Their intention was possibly to cover their support to the Khmer Rouge and to contain communism in the Southeast Asian region during the Cold War. Furthermore, the contents of the PPA served the external actors’ interests because the Western ideal of liberal democracy and multiparty elections were co-opted without considering the Cambodian political reality (Weyden, 2002). The Khmer Rouge’s withdrawal from the UN-supervised election might have resulted from element of the democratic election because it may have anticipated failure in the contest as a result of its past genocide and grave violation of human rights. Moreover, the international actors were not interested in resolving the conflict in Cambodia, but intended to advance their bilateral relations by pushing the factional parties to Cambodian conflict to reach a deal. Soviet Union lost its strategic interest as a result of its domestic politics while Vietnam had to respond to pressure of ASEAN, China and the US in order to have rapprochement with China and to renormalize its relation with the US (Brown,

1991). The success of political settlement in Cambodia was limited by ‘geopolitical Cold War realism’ because it was the outcome compromised by the US and China, seeking to normalize their relations with Soviet Union and Vietnam in the Southeast Asian region (Roberts, 2002). Thus, the external intervention’s interests in the outcomes hampered substantive peace process in Cambodia.

Leadership Change

According to Kriesberg (2005), leadership change could contribute to transformation of intractable conflict because new leaders might perceive an opportunity for change or view the problem in a different perspective. Conflict could be de-escalated when new conciliatory gestures or overtures are expressed. Kriesberg (2005) claims, “Unofficial or track-two channels are important in giving greater depth to the transformation movement. Such contacts also provide opportunities for relations to develop and knowledge to be acquired that modify the conceptions held about the other side and collective self-identities. They may also reframe relations so that grievances and goals are less zero-sum.” The death of the Khmer Rouge’s hard-line leader, Pol Pot, had resulted in unstable military and political organization of this group. Therefore, the de jure government of Cambodia, led by Prime Minister Hun Sen, seized this chance to launch his own covert negotiation with certain senior officials and military commanders of the Khmer Rouge, who subsequently defected to the government in late 1998 (Ledgerwood, 2002). The successful dismantling of the Khmer Rouge’s military and political organization without bloodshed was attributed to the ‘win-win’ policy, initiated by the premier Hun Sen. The key to the strategy were three ‘safety policies’- guaranteed personal and family safety, assured career safety and secured safety of properties- extended to voluntary defectors in order to end the conflict (Hun, 2006). The senior officials must have recognized new political realities in Cambodia fully supported by international community in the wake of the UN-organized election in 1993. Furthermore, the premier Hun Sen framed the defection as ‘not surrender or confession but an obligation to be fulfilled by all Cambodian sons and daughters in joining efforts to put an end to the war which the previous generations started.’ Hun Sen also blamed the Cold War and ideological confrontation for the intractable conflicts in Cambodia (Cambodian

New Vision, April 2008). This re-framing allowed the former Khmer Rouge leaders and combatants to see win-win situation rather than win-lose game. Therefore, leadership change, better awareness of new political realities, reframing and safety policy effected transformation of intractable conflict. These factors presented opportunity and capability to resolve conflict. Unlike the period with external actors' intervention in the late 1980s, the Khmer Rouge's officials at this time had their own will to make peace in exchange for amnesty and safety, given the new political realities in Cambodia. In this sense, the three conditions- opportunity, capability and volition- for resolving conflict prevailed (Tidwell, 1998). As a result, the intractable conflict in Cambodia starting from 1979 was eventually ended by the internal actors themselves without bloodshed in late 1998.

V. Analysis of Intervention

This section will examine how the 'win-win' policy, initiated by the premier Hun Sen, contributed to resolving the Cambodian conflict by taking into account reconciliation, human needs and shared identity theories.

Reconciliation Dimensions

Kriesberg (2007) defines reconciliation as the effort of "developing a mutual conciliatory accommodation between enemies or formerly antagonistic groups" with a view to "moving toward a relatively cooperative and amicable relationship". In reconciliation, four dimensions- truth, justice, respect and security- are addressed at different degrees. In the first dimension, victims' loss and injury must be acknowledged by perpetrators. In the second dimension, justice must be provided to victims. It could be done by punishing the wrongdoers, compensating victims, or institutionalizing new policies to prevent future injustice. The third dimension entails mercy and forgiveness. In the final dimension, security and safety must be extended to not only those suffering atrocities but also those abusing human rights. The perpetrators are fearful of revenge, retribution and punishment. (Kriesberg, 2007)

Hun Sen's 'win-win' policy chiefly addressed the last two dimensions of reconciliation. First, the government's amnesty was accorded to former Khmer Rouge leaders and soldiers in exchange for defection and peace. The forgiveness served to

recognize their humanity back to the society. Second, the 'win-win' policy guaranteed defectors' safety in terms of life, career and property (Hun, 2006). Therefore, this policy addressed the former Khmer Rouge troops' concern about and fear for revenge, discrimination and prosecution.

Kriesberg (2004 and 2007) advocates that the four dimensions of reconciliation could not be met simultaneously, and demand for both mercy and justice is impossible concurrently but sequentially. In this sense, the relative importance of those dimensions relies upon the context of conflict transformation and resolution. Despite the absence of truth and justice dimensions, the 'win-win' policy in Cambodia was successful because of Cambodia's social context. An Asian diplomat argued, "Probably there is a different sense of justice between West and East. It is almost like a reward for bringing peace and reconciliation. One has to know the magnitude of this breakaway movement." (Mydans, September 18, 1997) Therefore, if the truth and justice had been pressed for during negotiation for the defection, the deal for peace and national unity in Cambodia would not have been realized.

Upon successful integration of the former Khmer Rouge combatants into the mainstream society, tendency toward addressing truth and justice dimensions has emerged. However, they are being tackled tactfully so as to avoid endangering peace, territorial unity and reconciliation, which are hardly earned. In an attempt to bring justice to the victims and survivors, a hybrid court, comprised of both Cambodian and international judges, was created in 2006. Seeking to prosecute 'senior leaders of Democratic Kampuchea [Khmer Rouge] and those most responsible for crimes committed from 1975 to 1979', this tribunal is currently detaining five people accused of genocide and crime against humanity (Ouch, 2008). Moreover, Center for Justice and Reconciliation, a local non-governmental organization, recently organized a forum where former Khmer Rouge soldiers and victims terrorized by the Khmer Rouge regime held dialogues with a view to promoting understanding (Carmichael, April 16, 2010). This effort intends to address the truth dimension of the conciliation.

Human Needs Approach

John Burton suggests that conflict result from unfulfilled human needs. Therefore, satisfaction of human needs can help resolve conflict. Needs are defined as “basic human requirements for the continuation and propagation of life”. Maslow identifies five hierarchical needs: physiological need, safety need, belongingness and love need, esteem need, and need for self-actualization. (Tidwell, 1998)

Hun Sen-initiated ‘win-win’ policy corresponded to Maslow’s hierarchical needs considerably. It sought to provide the former Khmer Rouge soldiers with permanent legitimate home and job to support their living; personal and household security; full status of Cambodian citizens who can enjoy their rights constitutionally; and social recognition as Cambodian citizens through accorded amnesty and social positions. In a public forum, held by Center for Justice and Reconciliation, former Khmer Rouge soldiers expressed their pleasure to be called Cambodians because they were tired of being named as “former Khmer Rouge”, which implied “murders and oppression”. Furthermore, they even described improvement of life in the wake of their defection. A participant said, “Families used to live in the mountains and were unable to share a meal together. Now their children have schooling, and people have access to health services and good roads.” (Carmichael, April 16, 2010) According to a Western diplomat, former Khmer Rouge soldiers accepted the ‘win-win’ policy because they perceived a better life in exchange for their defection. The diplomat asserted, “They are tired of being poor. They are tired of mixing their rice with corn, of having no schools for their children. They are illiterate. Their teeth are falling out.” (Mydans, September 08, 1996) Therefore, former Khmer Rouge soldiers viewed the ‘win-win’ policy as fulfillment of not only their immediate needs but also their children’s.

Question on how the Cambodian prime minister came up with this safety policy should also be discussed. Two factors could contribute to the explanation. First, hardship, he experienced prior to his reign, made him well aware of combatants’ actual needs. Born in a peasant and rural family, he was educated by monks and teachers at a public high school in the capital of the country while Vietnam War was occurring. During his life, he had to flee from one place to another because he was accused of communist affiliation. When Prince Norodom Sihanouk was ousted in a coup in 1970, Hun Sen joined the

Khmer Rouge movement in response to Prince Sihanouk's appeal. Having realized the Khmer Rouge's atrocity and genocide, Hun Sen defected and ran to Vietnam where he was imprisoned in 1977 (Jennar, November 9, 1998). Thus, this personal life, resulting in loss of one eye and several injuries, could help him identify former Khmer Rouge soldiers' basic needs. Second, as a chief negotiator of the PRK in the Paris Peace Accord of 1991, Hun Sen might have learnt the Khmer Rouge's need for security because demobilization was the tense topic during the negotiation peace process (Hun, 2006). Hun Sen was portrayed as "both a pragmatist and an idealist" by Harish Mehta, co-author of "Hun Sen: Strongman of Cambodia" (Hun Sen's Biographer, 1999). Thus, Hun Sen's political wisdom and flexibility acquired from his personal and professional experience allow him to reframe new relation with and to present safety policy to his former enemy as win-win situation with a view to national reconciliation.

Shared Identity

Kriesberg (2004) underlines the role of shared identity and culture in removing barriers to 'deescalating a conflict and moving toward reconciliation'. The notion of shared identity also contributed to the success of premier Hun Sen's win-win policy. In his public speech (Hun, 2006), Hun Sen says, "The [Cambodian] people regard each other as only one race, achieve the same development and benefits under one constitution, one law and one government. The armed forces that used to fight each other have joined together without discrimination and division in terms of uniform and patriotism." Thus, the shared identity contributes to non-retaliation among the Cambodian people following Buddhism. Practiced by approximately 93% of the entire population, Buddhism- the state religion- has immense effect on Cambodian culture and daily life (International Religious Freedom Report, October 26, 2009). Hendrickson (1998) argues, "Cambodian Buddhism's timeless message of non-violence and compassion offer an important platform for promoting constructive social and political change in Cambodia today. Buddhism has always been much more a religion in Cambodia: it is a social doctrine encompassing all aspects of life." Therefore, Buddhism contributes to promoting non-retaliation among Cambodian people.

VI. Conclusion

At the height of the Cold War, Cambodian factional groups' quest for power plunged this Southeast Asian country into almost two-decade war in the wake of internal genocide. Efforts to resolve the conflict ranged from external intervention to internal actors. Although external intervention did not indeed fully secure peace on the ground, it contributed to transformation of the conflict and formation of a democratically-elected coalition government. By using analytical framework for conflict resolution, the external intervention addresses structural aspect because it brings the four warring parties to a table in order to negotiate redistribution of social power and resources based on democratic elections. Recognizing that external intervention's effort was hampered by the international actors' interests in the negotiation outcomes, internal actors devise a so-called 'win-win' policy, putting an end to the long-standing conflict through amnesty and integration of some former Khmer Rouge leaders and soldiers into the mainstream society. Based on analytical framework for conflict resolution, this local strategy addresses interest-based and emotional perspectives. While providing certain key posts to the former Khmer Rouge leaders, the 'win-win' policy not only accords amnesty but also secures safety in terms of life, job and property, thus allaying the defectors' fear for reprisal and prosecution.

In light of its successful experience in Cambodia, the so-called 'win-win' policy could serve as a model of conflict resolution in other settings. The Afghan government is currently pursuing two-track reconciliation plan to end war with Taliban regime by negotiating with Taliban leaders and persuading low-level Taliban combatants to lay down their guns in exchange for jobs and development projects (Partlow, February 04, 2010). Similarly, the current Thai premier has presented his reconciliation road map with a view to resolving the recent political crisis in Bangkok (Thai PM Offers, May 03, 2010). Therefore, the hindsight of Cambodian experience can contribute to assessment of the reconciliation policy in both Afghanistan and Thailand.

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