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Thai - Cambodia Relations: Current Challenges and Future Prospects

by

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Abstract

In celebration of the 20th year after the singing of the Cambodian Peace Agreement in 1991, this article seeks to descriptively review and analyze Cambodia's historic and current relations with its neighbor Thailand, from a specific perspective of security, economics and culture. As such, it takes current challenges and future prospects into account, while considering the potential role of Cambodia in future regional politics.

1. Introduction

As Cambodia has entered the 21st century, its relations with Thailand remain complex and multifaceted. State security, economical and cultural relations are highly intertwined with one another and to describe current Thai - Cambodian relations and future challenges that they might face requires an understanding of its history. When analyzing Cambodian current state security in relation to its Thai neighbor, one will unavoidably focus on the current and ongoing conflict at the border of the Preah Vihear temple, where military aggression from both parties have caused breaches of both Thai and Cambodian security. Economic relations must in turn be examined in light of this tension, while cultural relations can shed some light and increase the understanding of the problematic and complex relations between these two neighboring states.

Having previously and historically been recognized by the international community as a state with a totalitarian and genocidal regime which served as a stage for a proxy war, Cambodia has opened up and moved forward to embrace the 21st century, 20 years after the Paris Peace Agreement. How Cambodia decides to manage and maintain its external relations with its neighbors is a crucial aspect of its regional and indeed international image and conflict and possible lack of bilateral harmony with Thailand is highly likely to shape state security, possibly hamper economic growth and hinder inter-state accord through antagonistic cultural relations. Having had a troubled past of civil war and infringement on its territorial sovereignty, peace and stability remains central to Cambodia's future development and growth and, in this sense, it remains vital that Cambodia moves towards normalizing relations with its neighbor, Thailand.

The purpose of this article is therefore twofold. It will firstly describe and analyze current affairs in Thai - Cambodian relations, with an emphasis on security, economics and culture. Secondly, the analysis will be placed in a larger contextual framework of Cambodia's role of moving into the 21st century in celebration of the 20th anniversary of the Paris Peace Agreement, and how to best tackle future challenges from these perspectives. Having rapidly moved forward from the internal turmoil which characterized much of its recent history, Cambodia as a nation has come a long way.

Challenges remain, however, and how these are dealt with will likely provide a hint on the direction Cambodia will take for the future to come.

2. Current relations between Thailand and Cambodia

Security relations

As mentioned, current relations between Thailand and Cambodia in terms of security will inescapably focus on the ongoing border dispute and the Preah Vihear temple. The temple of Preah Vihear or Khao Phra Viharn, as it is called in Thai, is considered to be of great importance to both Thailand and Cambodia, which explains the claims made by both states in terms of ownership of the temple. Located in the Dangrek Mountains, the temple has generated military conflict several times, most recently in February and April of 2011, and as such, its relevance from a perspective of security is evident. The border conflict can however also be argued to indirectly influence economic and cultural relations between the two neighbors, and in this sense, the conflict should be seen as being central to present and future relations between Thailand and Cambodia.

The military aggression which can be seen at the border is a conflict which has deep historical roots, and to be able to analyze the current conflict, one must understand the historical and social context in which it exists. Although the Khmer empire dominated large parts of Siam (then Thailand) from the ninth until the twelfth century, the decline of the Khmer empire corresponded to a rise of the Kingdom of Siam, which can be argued to have perceived the Khmer kingdom as a tributary state.[1] Since, the fate of the two neighboring states has been very different. Although Thai independence was never assumed during the last two hundred years, its fate has been gentler than that of Cambodia which struggled and failed to remain independent. Cambodia has in this sense historically been the subject of much foreign domination, which to this day continuously shapes its approach to diplomatic relations with neighboring states. Thailand, on the other hand, has emerged from history as a state which dodged colonial powers, but

[1] Theeravit, Khien. ”Thai-Kampuchean Relations: Problems and Prospects. *Asian Survey*. 1982. p 562.

which still remains highly defensive of its sovereign territory, which in turn influences their approach to managing external relations with nearby states.

Following the establishment of the French protectorate in Cambodia, in 1863, the provinces of Battambang, Siem Reap and Sisophon remained under Thai control, as a part of the Siamese kingdom. These were handed over to the French and Kampuchea in 1907 and a convention from 1904 specifically referred to the temple of Preah Vihear, and the border separating Thailand and Cambodia was drawn up by the French who emphasized how the watershed in the Dangrek Mountains demarked the border. The map attached to the 1904 convention shows how the temple is located to the east of the watershed, and as such, how it belongs to Cambodia. Thailand, on the other hand, has continuously claimed how the attached map drawn by the French could not be seen as a realistic drawing of the actual border area, and how the temple was and still is located to the west of the watershed, making it Thai.

With both sides claiming the ownership of the temple, Cambodia called upon the International Court of Justice, the ICJ, in 1959 to settle the dispute.[2] In 1962 the ICJ ruled that the temple was situated in the territory of and under the sovereignty of Cambodia and that Thailand was under an obligation to withdraw any military or police forces stationed by the temple or on Cambodian territory.[3] It is important to note that the court also stated how Thailand could not claim some 50 years after the 1904 convention was agreed upon that it had never accepted the map which outlines the border area, especially since it had continued to produce maps domestically which also referred to the Preah Vihear temple as being within Cambodian territory and sovereignty. Since, printed maps in Thailand clearly show how the temple is located on Thai territory, illustrating how the ICJ legal settlement, although at the time forcing Thai into compliance, has not resolved the dispute. In this sense, the border clash can be viewed as a conflict which was never truly resolved, but rather re-emerge sporadically as a result of this.

[2] The International Court of Justice. *Preliminary Objections of the Government of Thailand.*1960.
[3] The International Court of Justice. *Temple of Preah Vihear (Cambodia v. Thailand. Preliminary Objections.* 1961. p 20.

Although acknowledging how the temple itself belongs to Cambodia, Thailand has since continued to claim how the 4.6 sq-km area surrounding the temple belongs to Thailand, again claiming how the map drawn by the French in 1904 is inaccurate. Claims made on the disputed area, which serves as the main entrance to the temple, has since resulted in military aggression in 2008, and more recently in 2011. Thailand has since February 2011 emphasized how this conflict can be resolved bilaterally whilst Cambodia has called for a third party intervention.[4] Indonesia, the current chair of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, was appointed with this task by the United Nations Security Council and has established a Thai -Cambodia Joint Border Commission which in cooperation with the General Border Committee is scheduled to meet in early April, to attempt to solve the conflict.[5] The tension between Thailand and Cambodia in recent clashes has caused several casualties and many livelihoods on both sides of the border have escaped the violent clashes, resulting in a large relocation and migration of people and a rupture in bilateral stability and security.[6]

Recent renewed hostility during 2011 has caused significant tension in Cambodian external relations with Thailand, and the border conflict is likely to influence the security of both nations in the near future.[7] Several parties such as Vietnam, Lao PDR, China, the U.S, the United Nations, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the European Union has furthermore urged both nations to refrain from violence and to settle the dispute by means of diplomacy and dialogue.[8] The border dispute has recently also had a

[4] The Bangkok Post. ”Boundary Talks Show Signs of Progress”. April 11, 2011.
[5] Voice of Vietnam. “”ASEAN Chair Proposes Cambodia-Thai Meeting”. March 9, 2011.
[6] IRIN Humanitarian News and Analysis. “Cambodia-Thailand; 36,000 Displaced by Deadly Border Clashes”. April 25, 2011.
[7] The Washington Post. “Fighting Resumes Along Thailand-Cambodia Border a Day After at Least 6 Soldiers are Killed. April 22, 2011
[8] Asia-Pacific News. “Cambodia-Thailand Border Conflict “Very Worrying”, EU’s Ashton Says”. April 27, 2011.
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spillover effect, and clashes has taken place at the temples of Ta Moan, Ta Krabei, the village of Thmar Doun and the town of O'Smach.[9]

As officially stated by the Cambodian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, the MFAIC, on the 15th of February 2011, Thailand is considered to be in violation of the United Nations Security Council recommendation by initiating aggressive military actions, and the Ministry also states how Cambodian military has been given orders to exercise outmost restrain when responding to these actions.[10] One of the major points raised in these press releases refers to how the Thai invasion itself symbolized the true intention of Thailand; a desire to resolve the border dispute on a bilateral level, and moreover, how Thailand seeks to use its overwhelming military forces to take over Cambodian territory.[11] Another major point raised in official communication between Cambodia, Thailand and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Indonesia is how Cambodia accepts and encourage the deployment of Indonesian border observers but how Thai acceptance is missing for deployment on Thai soil, again emphasizing how Thailand wishes to settle the dispute bilaterally.[12]

In April of 2011, Cambodia also raised allegations of how Thailand had made use of cluster munitions at the border which at first was denied by Thai officials.[13] Incurring more damage to civilians in years following their planting than to military soldiers during times of conflict, cluster munitions have been banned through the Cluster Munition Coalition, the CMC, since 2008 and are now considered to form an integral part of International Public Law and Humanitarian Law.[14] Since, Thailand has acknowledged how cluster bombs have been used, but that it has been done in self-defense and based upon the principles of necessity and proportionality, in compliance with Humanitarian Law.[15]

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[9] Asia-Pacific News. "Fighting Resumes Along Thai-Cambodian Border – Spreads To New Area. April 28,, 2011.
[10] The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation.. *Cambodian Foreign Ministry Statement.* February 16, 2011.
[11] Ibid.
[12] The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation. *Statement of the Spokesman of the Foreign Ministry.* March 25, 2011.
[13] The Bangkok Post. "Cluster Bomb Claim Denied". April 8, 2011.
[14] The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation. *CMC Condemns Use of Cluster Munitions in Cambodia.* April 7th, 2011.
[15] Asia-Pacific News. "Activist Group Says Thailand used Cluster Munitions in Border Clash. April 6, 2011.

The claim of ownership of the Preah Vihear temple and the territory surrounding it has come to symbolize the problematic relations between Cambodia and Thailand in recent years. The conflict itself can be viewed and explained in several different manners, and when keeping the historic context mentioned above in mind, the unresolved tension between the neighboring states can be viewed as nationalistic Thai ambitions clashing with a Cambodian desire to have its borders and territorial sovereignty acknowledged and respected, which can be seen as a direct extension of historic diplomatic relations between the two countries, described above.

Internal domestic politics at play within both nations should however also be taken into consideration. The political climate in Thailand is currently volatile and it is not unlikely that the upcoming Thai election play a part in the current pursuit of Thai foreign policy. Thailand can be seen to be in the midst of a political transition, where the relationship between the civil and the military sphere is complex and intertwined. Moreover, ultranationalists "yellow shirts" have played a part in stirring Thai antagonism towards Cambodia, and where the current ruling of the country has been questioned and de-legitimized by stating how Thailand currently is unable to protect its national state territory, as the Preah Vihear temple remains Cambodian.[16]

Anti – Cambodian rhetoric in Thailand has in turn been used by the Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen to promote extensive nationalism in Cambodia. It is also noteworthy that Major General Hun Manet, Hun Sen's eldest son, is one of the main commanders at the disputed border and speculation has been made if the Major General is to be Hun Sen's successor.[17] Accordingly, the border dispute between Thailand and Cambodia can be viewed and to some extent explained by domestic political factors within the two neighboring countries. With the border dispute now being politicized, intra-state issues of managing internal political issues are legitimized by both nations focusing on an external threat. This can be argued to explain Thai actions where a rationale of "reclaiming" the Preah Vihear temple and the territory it is located upon is a policy pursued by the Thai Prime Minister, Abhisit Vejjajiva, who by fixating Thai focus on an

[16] Keo, T. Peter. "Deal With Preah Vihear Peacefully" *PacNet Number 19*, *Pacific Forum CSIS.* Honolulu, Hawaii. 2011. p 1.
[17] Asia Times Online. "Domestic Issues Fuel Thai-Cambodian Spats. April 30, 2011.

external policy matter, whishes to legitimize and retain his rule of the country and where the temple is barely a political means to an political end. The response of Cambodia can in turn be viewed as Prime Minister Hun Sen wishing to create national unity through the promotion of nationalism and to legitimize and create the opportunity for passing on his Prime Ministerial powers to his son.

Economic relations

In the late 1980's it was stated by Thailand how it wished to turn the battlefields of Cambodia into market places. With the signing of the Paris Peace Agreement in Paris in 1991, Thai and Cambodia again established full diplomatic relations which included extensive relations in terms of tourism and trade.[18] With the opening up of Cambodian markets for Thai goods, Cambodia in turn offered new prospects to Thailand in terms of natural products in high demand and low availability in Thailand. With the elections held in Cambodian in 1993, specific trade agreements, with a purpose to boost bilateral trade, were signed.

Although the border dispute between Thailand and Cambodia can be argued to affect relations in general, it should be noted how both countries have pledged that it should be contained to the border area and how trade should not be affected by military hostilities stirring.[19] Indeed, both countries have instead emphasized the need for an increase in bilateral trade by promoting the Thai Product Expo to be held in Phnom Penh in May, 2011. This expo is normally organized once a year, yet the border spat has caused officials to instead meet several times annually within this framework, attempting to keep economic relations between the two countries dynamic and normalized. [20] Both nations have furthermore also stated how they are committed to not only maintain economic relations, but to also move towards strengthening bilateral trade relations.[21] In

[18] French, Lindsay. "From Politics to Economics at the Thai-Cambodian Border: Plus Ca Change…. *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society. p* 449.
[19] National News Bureau of Thailand Public Relations Department. November 8, 2011.
[20] Xinhuanet English News. Thailand Tries to Boost Trade with Cambodia Despite Border Dispute. March 24, 2011.
[21] Investor's Business Daily. *Thailand, Cambodia Agree to Strengthen Economic Relations Despite Border Tension.* February 19th, 2011.

this sense both countries have emphasized the need for containing the border dispute to the local area at the border, ensuring that trade relations remain strong. To further promote good office economic relations, Cambodia has stressed and guaranteed the safety of Thai businessmen and investors.

Cultural relations

Thai-Cambodian cultural relations remain quite complicated, due to a complex historic past. As argued by French, political and economic relations between Thailand and Cambodia have continuously evolved yet cultural relations and interaction remain much the same.[22] Acknowledging but moving beyond how both a Thai and Khmer identity is not necessarily homogenous, Thai cultural relations with Cambodia have deep historical roots and while Thais generally remain ignorant of the history of Angkor Wat, Khmer's are commonly unaware of their religious ties with Thailand. Many, however, emphasize resemblance between the Thai and Cambodian culture through similarities in royal customs, language, writing systems, cultural customs, traditions, beliefs, ways of life, literature and the dramatic arts.

Despite sharing certain cultural traits in a region which is otherwise quite diverse, cultural relations between the two countries remain tense and several explanations for this exists. As an example, Cambodian neutrality during the Cold War has been argued to have angered a pro-American Thailand, and a more recent example of the problematic relationship can be observed in the riots in Phnom Penh in 2003, which resulted in the sacking of the Thai Embassy, following a statement made by the Thai movie star Morning Star allegedly emphasizing a superiority of Thai cultural heritage in comparison with a Khmer origin.[23] Furthermore and as mentioned above, domestic conditions in Thailand can be seen to have exacerbated the Preah Vihear conflict, where Khmer's are considered inferior constitutively as Khmer's view the Thai's as a threat to their national

[22] French, Lindsay. "From Politics to Economics at the Thai-Cambodian Border: Plus Ca Change…. *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society. p* 428.
[23] For an interesting recount of the conflict please see Hinton, Alexander. "Khmerness and the Thai "Other": Violence, Discourse and Symbolism in the 2003 Anti-Thai Riots in Cambodia. *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies.* 2006.

sovereignty. For two countries which touch ground upon quite a few cultural traits, relations seem quite complex.

Thai and Cambodian cultural relations can perhaps best be understood in a framework of how both cultures are strongly entrenched in their social identity. As such, a Khmer "self" and group identity is created by separating and distinguishing themselves from a Thai social identity, and vice versa. Although cultural qualities are shared, the division between the two cultures remains significant. When Khmer's separate themselves from the Thai's they do so by highlighting the traits which makes them unique from the Thai's, by the promotion of their "self" in relation to an "other". The identity of Khmer's is in turn further enforced, shaped and re-shaped by comparison with the Thai "other".

Bias of a group which share an identity, such as the Thai's and Khmer's, tend to promote their own group and exercise negative bias towards the other group, which is considered as a natural process for identity formation. The issue occurs, however, when a cultural group who share a common identity promote their own group's superiority to such an extent that the corresponding group is seen as a scapegoat, and when diplomatic, security or economic relations are negatively affected by this process. This can be viewed in instances where ultra-nationalism is promoted, and the complexity of Thai and Cambodian cultural relations can in this sense again be linked to the current border instability at Preah Vihear. An over-emphasis on nationalism where the Thai's for example are separating themselves from the Khmer's by emphasizing how they are more modern, civilized and trustworthy automatically creates a Thai identity which is at odds with Khmer's, who automatically become less-developed, uncivilized and untrustworthy.[24] Thai opinions are in turn understood by the Khmer from a historical context of how Thai domination is an ever lingering threat to their national boundaries, and indeed to the existence of their cultural group. In this sense, cultural similarity between the two nations can be argued to increase the complex nature of cultural relations, rather than reconciling it.

[24] Ibid, p 463.

3. Future prospects of Thai – Cambodia relations

Security relations

It is highly likely that the management and resolution of the Preah Vihear temple will remain central to Cambodian national security and its relations with Thailand. Having been proactive in attempting to resolve tension and accommodate Thai demands, is still remains unlikely that Cambodia will be able to resolve this dispute on its own. A future challenge for Cambodia in its relations with Thailand will therefore be to engage all diplomatic channels available through the United Nations, the Association for Southeast Asian Nations and the International Court of Justice.[25] In collaboration with the United Nations, Cambodia must continue to stress the need for peacekeeping forces at the border. Cambodia should also continuously draw international and regional attention to Thai use of cluster bombs and other toxic weapons which should be completely condemned as it is in violation of International Public Law and Humanitarian Law. It would also be beneficial if United Nations could be increasingly engaged in the conflict by putting political pressure on both nations in terms of agreeing on ceasefire policies from a short-term perspective, and conflict resolution from a long-term perspective.

Cambodia must also engage with ASEAN in a similar manner that it has until now, demanding how all regional mechanisms are used to resolve this tension. ASEAN capacity to resolve the conflict is likely to be limited, yet again it is imperative to make use of all channels when attempting to manage and resolve this border dispute. Conflict avoidance is not the way forward in this situation, and a future challenge for ASEAN will be to shoulder the responsibility in managing regional relations where the conflict is dealt with sufficiently. This includes the establishment of a normative idea of how inter-state disputes should be dealt with on a regional basis in the future. By actively exhausting all diplomatic channels for conflict management and resolution, Cambodia will also establish and entrench its own role and position in both national and regional relations, and its future role as an ASEAN member country.

[25] There are currently discussions on the possible future involvement of the International Court of Justice or a UN court to clarify the legal decision made in 1962, as stated in Straits Times. “Cambodia Appeals to World Court over Border Temple”. April 29, 2011.

It is clear then that current political relations between Thailand and Cambodia remains tense at best. Much work remains to be done for the nation of Cambodia which must balance the interests of national state security and regional harmony, when seeking to have its borders respected. Dialogue, diplomacy and a pro-active engagement remains key to resolve this conflict, and Cambodia should pursue this to avoid that Thai - Cambodian relations remain volatile, strained and rigid.

Economic relations

Although Cambodia and Thailand has pledged to not let the on-going border dispute influence trade and general economic relations between the two countries, it is likely that this will pose as one of the main challenges for future Thai-Cambodia economic relations. To not let domestic and external political instability influence economic relations will most likely be difficult, and economic growth should remain one of the main interests of both countries.

As Cambodia, however, remains less developed than its Thai neighbor, it is also clear that sound economic relations with its neighbor perhaps is more crucial from a Cambodian than Thai perspective. As such, it is crucial that Cambodia further integrate into the region, both to explore and develop economic relations with its other neighbors, but also to fully use the benefits associated with regional integration into the ASEAN community. In this sense, Cambodia should capitalize on its comparative advantage, which in general center on industries which are land and labor intensive.[26] Its comparative advantage could be further developed by regional support through ASEAN Free Trade Areas, with an overarching attempt to one of the main issues of contemporary Cambodia; the eradication of poverty. In conjunction with the development of human resources, agricultural, rural, industrial and environmental development, regional economic integration offers many benefits to a developing Cambodia.

[26] Kato, Toshiyasu, Sophal, Chan, Piseth, V, Long. "Regional Economic Integration for Sustainable Development in Cambodia. Working Paper 5. *Cambodia Development Resource Institute.* September 1998.

Cultural relations

If one accepts the underlying notion of how culture can be seen as a social identity which is crated, shaped and re-shaped as a social process, current antagonism and scapegoating between Thailand and Cambodia, in relation to the border dispute, is problematic. A future challenge for Cambodian cultural relations with Thailand can thus be argued to be to refrain from promoting ultra-nationalism as it hampers relations and produces discourse where group identity bias is allowed to run rampant and where discrimination and scapegoating is promoted. This is a crucial challenge for future cultural relations between the two neighbors as it is highly likely that this will negatively affect the overall and general relations between these two countries.

Accordingly, the bridging of gaps between Thai and Cambodia in terms of culture will most likely become a future challenge and it is unlikely that reparation of diplomatic relations will be uncomplicated or straightforward.[27] Efforts will in fact most likely be multifaceted, and to attempt to create bilateral security, stability and harmony, cultural traits which are shared by these two nations should instead be promoted, in an attempt to increase cross-cultural understanding. A de-emphasis on nationalism should also be promoted simultaneously as regional social and cultural identity is further emphasized. In this sense, a regional citizenship could be promoted which would include a somewhat similar approach to culture, for example through religion, the sharing of similar traditions and literature.

4. Conclusion

Due to a colorful historic past, Cambodia's relations with its neighbor Thailand remain complex, at times quite tense and embedded in social context. As Cambodia and indeed the entire region moves into the 21st century, 20 years after the Cambodian Peace Accord was signed, several challenges remain.

[27] Asia-Pacific News. "Thai-Cambodian Border Tensions Have a Long History". April 22, 2011.

In terms of security, Cambodian border tension with Thailand remains central. Having recently adopted a proactive role when attempting to accommodate Thailand and ASEAN, Cambodia needs to exhaust all possible mechanisms, both regionally and internationally, to ensure that its territorial state borders are respected. In terms of economic relations, both Thailand and Cambodia have attempted to ensure that bilateral trade remains secure and unaffected by the tension felt at the border. This is positive, and should continuously be promoted in the future as a stagnation of trade will most likely affect the economic growth of both countries. As economic growth is crucial to the continued development of Cambodia, the maintenance of healthy economic relations with its neighbors should be prioritized. Cambodia should also pursue further integration into the region, especially in terms of exploring the full potential and benefits which can be derived from AFTA and to examine its economic relations with other countries within the region.

Cultural relations between Thailand and Cambodia remains problematic and Cambodia should move towards harmonizing these relations as they have both a direct and indirect influence on economic relations and the security of both nations. Cultural understanding should be promoted, to avoid cultural scapegoating and deterioration of Thai and Cambodian cultural relations. Understanding Cambodian history is key, and although national unity has been an important goal to achieve for Cambodia after the signing of the Paris Peace Agreement, overemphasis on nationalism is not necessarily the most beneficial way to attain this as it is likely that this will exacerbate tension and division, rather than promoting harmonic bilateral relations between itself and its neighbors. Thai and Cambodian relations should in this sense instead emphasize the cultural traits which are common and shared between both nations as the establishment and maintenance of harmonious relations with its Thai neighbor is crucial for future development of Cambodia, through political, economic and cultural stability.

It is fitting then, that Cambodia can be seen to be at a crossroad as it closes up on its 20 years anniversary of the Cambodian Peace Agreement signed in Paris. Cambodia has developed rapidly and many opportunities for further development exist. Its options for further development have multiplied and it should make use of all possible mechanisms

at its disposal when managing bilateral and multilateral relations with its neighboring countries and fellow ASEAN member countries. How it will make use of these mechanisms will most likely set the tune for its own national development and its role within a larger framework of regional politics.

By doing so, Cambodia will also further establish an identity and image on both an international and regional level of how historical violent tendencies are just that, historical, and how it indeed is moving forward as a nation which conduct its external relations mainly by dialogue and diplomacy. If Cambodia could refrain from the use of violence to resolve tension with Thailand, it is also likely that this would promote a more beneficial climate domestically, with an emphasis on peace. Having emerged from totalitarianism and a planned economic system, Cambodia has made a transition into a liberal democracy with political pluralism and a free market economy. Many challenges however still remain, and in this sense, the future of Cambodia remains unwritten, yet full of potential.

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