

**WARID:** Cambodia (Khmer Rouge) 1979-1998  
**STARDATE:** 31 January 1979  
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Related cases: none  
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### **Conflict overview**

The conflict between the Cambodian government (CGP) and the Khmer Rouge (KR) or, Party of Democratic Kampuchea (PDK), was preceded by a history of civil war and terror, with several shifts in power and alternating alliances between the conflicting parties. In 1970, a civil war erupted in Cambodia, between the right-wing military leaders under former Prime Minister Lon Nol on one side and the anti-government alliance of Prince Sihanouk and his royalist followers with the communist Khmer Rouge on the other. The unusual alliance between the royalists and the Khmer Rouge was formed on the grounds of the proclaimed anti-Americanism held by both parties (Chandler 1991; Kiernan 1996). The Khmer Rouge succeeded in overthrowing the regime in 1975 (Hazdra 1997: 39). Refusing to share power with the royalists, the Khmer Rouge initiated the communist terror regime of ‘Democratic Kampuchea’ (DK), killing and starving up to two million Cambodians, Vietnamese, Chinese and other ethnic and religious minorities in only three years (Clodfelter 2002: 690). The Khmer Rouge regime gradually drew the country into a war with Vietnam: Vietnamese troops invaded Cambodia in December 1978 and helped overthrow the Khmer Rouge and its leader Pol Pot (Chandler 1991). The government in Phnom Penh fell on 7 January 1979 and a pro-Vietnamese communist government was installed. The Kampuchean National United Front for National Salvation (KNUFNS) was the new the government of the now renamed ‘People’s Republic of Kampuchea’; it mostly consisted of exiled Cambodians from Vietnam. All the important members of this government had been high-ranking Khmer Rouge officials who fled to Vietnam during the internal ‘cleansings’ (Chandler 1991: 2; Kiernan 1996: 455).

The Khmer Rouge, devoid of resources and support from the population, had to flee into remote mountainous and jungle regions near the border to Thailand (Etcheson 1987: 189). They regrouped and started an armed resistance through guerrilla warfare. This marked the beginning of a new conflict period pitting the Cambodian Government and Vietnamese troops against the Khmer Rouge and two non-communist rebel groups. The rebels were supported by

China with weapons and equipment over the Thai border. The two non-communist resistance groups – the Khmer People’s National Liberation Front (KPNLF) under the leadership of Son Sann and the National United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful, and Cooperative Cambodia (FUNCINPEC) led by Prince Sihanouk – were supported by several Western countries, including the USA. The alliance was held together by its opposition to the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia and a shared fear of the country’s ‘Vietnamization’. The exiled parties deemed the end of the occupation to be their main task and insisted on the “withdrawal of foreign forces” in several treaties regarding the Cambodian conflict (Acharya et al. 1991: xxx-xxxii).

The government side received substantial political and military support from both the Soviet Union and Vietnam through the end of the 1980s (Hazdra 1997: 52). At the end of the Cold War in September 1989, the Vietnamese withdrew their forces from Cambodia; in turn, foreign support for the warring parties decreased substantially.

After the first attempt to negotiate an agreement between the warring parties failed in September 1989, the second Paris Conference on Cambodia took place on 23 October 1991 and resulted in the signing of the Paris Agreement on Cambodia by all four political factions in Cambodia; together, they formed the Supreme National Council of Cambodia (SNC) and granted the United Nations “all powers necessary” to supervise and ensure the implementation of the agreement (Chopra 1994: 1). The United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) became operational on 15 March 1992 and the mandate included supervision of the ceasefire as well as direct control of the existing civil administrative structures in Cambodia;<sup>1</sup> the latter included drafting and supervising electoral law, electoral processes and codes of conduct (Chopra 1994: 2). Despite being a signatory of the Paris Agreement, the Khmer Rouge refused to abide by the agreements’ provisions for a UN-supervised ceasefire, demobilization and disarmament, and soon resumed fighting (St John 2006: 98). The general ceasefire agreement brokered during the second Paris Conference was maintained until January 1992, although violent clashes between the Khmer Rouge and the government forces occurred prior to that (Hazdra 2000: 232ff).

The first elections were held under UNTAC supervision on 23-25 May 1993; in the course of this process, both the KPNLF and FUNCINPEC reformed and established themselves as political parties. The FUNCINPEC won the elections and formed a tenuous coalition government with Hun Sen’s Cambodian People’s Party (CPP), which had been ruling Cambodia

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1 E.g. in the fields of foreign affairs, national defense, finance, public security, and information.

following Pol Pot's defeat in 1979.<sup>2</sup> The Khmer Rouge, on the other hand, did not register as a political party, boycotted the elections and resumed attacks on Vietnamese civilians and UNTAC peacekeepers at the end of 1992 (Chopra 1994: 27). After the registration deadline for UN elections had passed for the Khmer Rouge on 31 January 1993, full-scale combat between the government and Khmer Rouge resumed (Chopra 1994: 28). In the following seven years, the Khmer Rouge remained the only rebel force in the country (Hazdra 2000: 293f.). In 1996, senior Khmer Rouge leaders began defecting to the government in return for amnesty (HRW 2012: 10). In the subsequent two years, the Khmer Rouge would experience further turmoil.<sup>3</sup> After Pol Pot died in April 1998, the remaining guerrilla forces subsequently dissolved in the months that followed (ICG 1999: 20). With the Khmer Rouge de facto ceasing to exist, the conflict ended by the end of 1998 with the victory by the government led by Prime Minister Hun Sen [**WARENDUC=4; WARENDOS=4; WARDUR=239**].<sup>4</sup>

According to the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP), 5,700 people lost their lives during combat between the government and the rebelling parties from 1979 to 1998, as well as through one-sided violence against civilians from 1990 to 1998 [**FATALUC=6000**].<sup>5</sup> However, other sources estimate a much higher death toll. Micheal Clodfelter (2002: 690) states that at least 150,000 Cambodians were killed during that time [**FATALOS=150000**]. According to the World Bank, the total population of Cambodia amounted to seven million in 1978 [**PREWARPO=7000000**].<sup>6</sup> Depending on which differing estimate for the death toll is used, the intensity of the conflict ranges from fairly low (0.09%) to very high (2.14%) [**INTENSUC=0.09; INTENSOS=2.14**].

### **The military balance at the end of the war**

By 1998, the Khmer Rouge had run out of capacities; the International Crisis Group refers to the group as a “dying rebel movement” (ICG 2000: 29). Their leaders were by and large either captured, dead or had deserted to the government side. Thus, the war ended with a military victory by the government [**VICTORY= -1**].

During the war, the Khmer Rouge controlled parts of Cambodia's territory. They were able to exercise military and civil rule over these areas and also defend against intrusion by UNTAC and government forces (Amer 1993: 218; Etcheson 1987: 187; Findlay 1995: 59). In military terms, the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Phnom Penh in 1989 allowed the opposing

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2 [http://www.ucdp.uu.se/gpdata/gpcountry.php?id=27&regionSelect=7-Eastern\\_Asia#](http://www.ucdp.uu.se/gpdata/gpcountry.php?id=27&regionSelect=7-Eastern_Asia#) (4 Mar 2015).

3 <http://www.yale.edu/cgp/chron.html> (4 Mar 2015).

4 [http://www.ucdp.uu.se/gpdata/gpcountry.php?id=27&regionSelect=7-Eastern\\_Asia#](http://www.ucdp.uu.se/gpdata/gpcountry.php?id=27&regionSelect=7-Eastern_Asia#) (4 Mar 2015).

5 [http://www.ucdp.uu.se/gpdata/gpcountry.php?id=27&regionSelect=7-Eastern\\_Asia#](http://www.ucdp.uu.se/gpdata/gpcountry.php?id=27&regionSelect=7-Eastern_Asia#) (4 Mar 2015).

6 <http://databank.worldbank.org/data/views/reports/tableview.aspx#> (24 Feb 2015).

coalition (CGDK) to make territorial gains in the western and northern parts of the country; by 1992, the three rebel organizations together controlled about 15% of Cambodia's territory (Hazdra 2000: 58). Throughout the war, rebels managed to recruit fighters from the areas they had retreated to and to extract resources from the areas under their control. Further evidence of the control exercised by the Khmer Rouge is implied in the case of KR-leader Ieng Sary, who was allowed to maintain control of an area around the western town of Pailin after he officially defected to the government in 1996 (cf. Lizee 1997). Sary's rule in this area has been characterized as violent, "denying basic rights and largely banning Buddhist religious practices", which again stresses the wide-scale civil rather than military control of territories held by the KR.<sup>7</sup> By the end of the war, the Khmer Rouge had lost control of most of its territory. Nevertheless, ICG (1999: 20) reports that, even after the end of war, "former guerrillas maintain de facto control over significant areas of western and northern Cambodia" **[REBTERR= -1; MORETERR= -1]**.<sup>8</sup>

According to Cunningham et al. (2009), the fighting capacity of the rebel side was 'moderate' **[REBFIGHT=0]**.<sup>9</sup> This assessment is supported by other sources which estimate that, during the years of the CGDK coalition from 1982 to 1991, the three rebel groups had up to 60,000 fighters at their disposal (in comparison to about 50,000 government troops),<sup>10</sup> whereas in 1992/1993, the Khmer Rouge's forces alone counted 22,000 combatants (as opposed to 111,000 government forces).<sup>11</sup> Following mass defections of Khmer Rouge fighters to the government and the last serious battle with government troops in spring 1998, the remaining Khmer Rouge fighters no longer held any territory and barely had the capacities left to continue fighting the Phnom Penh government **[CONFIGHT= -1]**.<sup>12</sup>

Khmer Rouge leader Pol Pot died in April 1998, and the remaining guerrilla forces seceded to the government in December. Two of the three surviving hold-out revolutionary leaders – nominal chief Khieu Samphan and ideologue Nuon Chea – surrendered to the government on Christmas Day (ICG 1999: 20). There are no reports that the Khmer Rouge leadership was killed or captured by government forces in the last months of the conflict **[LEADER=0]**.

In conclusion, the military balance at the end of war was mainly to the advantage of the CPP government **[WARBAL= -0.67]**.

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7 <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/1998/cambodia#.VOxc6C6DjOI> (24 Feb 2015).

8 As the case literature clearly indicates that Khmer Rouge exercised both military and civil control over Cambodian territories during and by the end of the war, we dismiss the judgment made by Cunningham et al. (2009) that the Khmer Rouge did not have any territory under their control throughout the war.

9 Cunningham et al. 2009.

10 <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/past/unamicbackgr.html> (4 Mar 2015).

11 Cf. Hazdra 2000: 449.

12 <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/1998/cambodia#.VNs6Ay5EaUk> (24 Feb 2015).

## The post-war military balance

In 1994, the Cambodian National Assembly outlawed the PDK as an organization, and, in 1999, the UN recommended the creation of a tribunal in order to put former Khmer Rouge leaders on trial for atrocities committed in the years of their rule 1975-1978.<sup>13</sup> There was no participation by Khmer Rouge in the state's armed forces; the Military Balance yearbooks (International Institute for Strategic Studies 1998-2013) do not indicate any participation of the Khmer Rouge opposition in Cambodia's military or police, either [**STATEFOR 1999-2012= -1**].

Peter Hazdra (2000: 343) argues that after the 'desertion program' was launched in 1994, only around 5,000 rebel fighters remained with the Khmer Rouge. The assessment by the IISS that only around 600-1,000 fighters had remained by 1998 can therefore be deemed realistic. After 1998, the IISS yearbooks only provide data on the Khmer Rouge for the years 2005-2007, at which time their strength was estimated to be 1,000-2,000 fighters (cf. Annex 1). As the case literature does not indicate a re-establishment of the Khmer Rouge or any further attacks launched by the rebels, we suggest dismissing the alleged re-appearance of Khmer Rouge fighters in 2005-2007; we conclude that only the government side possessed separate armed forces [**SEPFORCE 1999-2012= -1**].<sup>14</sup> Accordingly, the variables 'troops' and 'arms' are not relevant [**TROOPS 1999-2012=n.r.**; **ARMS 1999-2012=n.r.**].<sup>15</sup>

After the end of the war, the rebels did not control any disputed territory, whereas the government remained in full control of the state's territory throughout the entire post-war period [**TERRCON 1999-2012= -1**; **TERRWIN 1999-2012= -1**; **VULNERAB 1999-2012= -1**].

The United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) ended in 1993, and no other armed peacekeeping forces were deployed thereafter [**PEACKEEP 1999-2012=n.r.**].

Although both the CPP government and the exiled opposition groups, the KPNLF, FUNCINPEC and Khmer Rouge had received support from permanent members of the UN Security Council during the first phase of the conflict, this substantially changed following the end of the Cold War. After the signing of the Paris Agreements, none of the parties can be assumed to have had a strong ally to intervene on their behalf [**P5ALLY 1999-2012=n.r.**].<sup>16</sup>

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13 <http://www.yale.edu/cgp/chron.html>; Law to outlaw the Democratic Kampuchea Group, <http://www.eccc.gov.kh/en/documents/legal/law-outlaw-democratic-kampuchea-group> (4 Mar 2015).

14 If we acknowledge that the PDK had separate armed forces between 2005 and 2007, the coding would be: [**SEPFORCE 1999-2004= -1**; **SEPFORCE 2005-2007=0**; **SEPFORCE 2008-2012= -1**].

15 Otherwise, compared to the troop ratio at the end of the war, the balance would have changed in favor of the Khmer Rouge in the years 2005-2007 [**TROOPS 1999-2004=n.d.**; **TROOPS 2005-2007=1**; **TROOPS 2008-2012=n.d.**].

16 [http://www.ucdp.uu.se/gpdata/gpcountry.php?id=27&regionSelect=7-Eastern\\_Asia#](http://www.ucdp.uu.se/gpdata/gpcountry.php?id=27&regionSelect=7-Eastern_Asia#) (4 Mar 2015).

In sum, the military balance in the post-war period was completely in favor of the CPP government [POSTBAL 1999-2012= -1]. Altogether, the data on the military balance at the end of the war and during the post-war period result in a strong advantage for the government [BALANCE 1999-2012= -0.83].

## Economy

According to the World Bank, the Cambodian population and gross domestic product (GDP) per capita have grown steadily after the end of the war in 1998.

Table 1: GDP per capita in current USD<sup>17</sup>

<i>Year</i>	<i>Population</i>	<i>GDP per capita</i>
1998	11685332	267
1999	11960467	294
2000	12222871	299
2001	12472586	319
2002	12709336	337
2003	12934369	360
2004	13149386	406
2005	13356424	471
2006	13555054	537
2007	13747288	628
2008	13940518	743
2009	14144225	735
2010	14364931	783
2011	14605862	878
2012	14864646	945

## The scale of compromise in the post-war period

The constitution of Cambodia – adopted during the UNTAC mandate in 1993 – abides by the principles of liberal democracy and pluralism, guaranteeing a multi-party political system and regular elections.<sup>18</sup> After the Khmer Rouge refused to participate in the (democratic) political system, the organization was regarded as a militant armed group, and, along with other armed groups, was formally banned in 1994 (ICG 1999: 20, FN 38; Roberts 2001: 207).<sup>19</sup> Many former Khmer Rouge leaders and lower-level combatants defected to the government or were pardoned under the amnesty program of 1996. As a result, some former Khmer Rouge members held official positions in Cambodia (Freedom House 2012). In 1997, an international tribunal was to be established in Cambodia to bring former Khmer Rouge leaders to justice for atrocities committed during their reign from 1975 to 1978. However, the Hun Sen gov-

17 <http://databank.worldbank.org/data/views/reports/tableview.aspx> (24 Feb 2015).

18 The Constitution of the Kingdom of Cambodia, [http://cambodia.ohchr.org/klc\\_pages/KLC\\_files/section\\_001/section\\_01\\_01\\_ENG.pdf](http://cambodia.ohchr.org/klc_pages/KLC_files/section_001/section_01_01_ENG.pdf) (20 Mar 2015).

19 Freedom House 2004: Countries at the Crossroads – Cambodia Report, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/countries-crossroads/2004/cambodia#.VRF57eHzHOI> (25 Mar 2015).

ernment proved reluctant to hold a thorough investigation; the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC) – or the Khmer Rouge Tribunal (Freedom House 2012) – was not established until 2008.<sup>20</sup> As a consequence, only a few former Khmer Rouge leaders have faced trial,<sup>21</sup> and a “culture of impunity” persisted in the country (Bertelsmann 2012). Nevertheless, the Khmer Rouge remains legally banned as a political entity in Cambodia, precluding any participation in the country’s government [**GOVERN 1999-2012= -1**].<sup>22</sup>

The first elections in Cambodia were held in 1993 under the mandate of the UNTAC peace-keeping mission; they were won by the royalist FUNCINPEC (Bertelsmann 2012: 4). The party entered an uneasy power-sharing alliance with Hun Sen’s Cambodian People’s Party, resulting in an arrangement with two prime ministers: Hun Sen and Prince Norodom Ranariddh (Roberts 2001: 150ff.). A coup later ensued in Phnom Penh 1997 and Prince Ranariddh fled into exile and after intense fighting between royalist- and CPP-aligned military forces (Freedom House 2012; Roberts 2001: 168ff.). For the following elections of 1998, Hun Sen and his CPP were able to secure a monopoly of governing power that endured for the whole period under investigation (Freedom House 2012; Peou 1999; Roberts 2001: 181ff.). Post-war elections took place in 2003 and 2008. For the entire period until the end of 2012, Freedom House evaluated political rights with the second-worst rating possible [**ELECT 1999-2012= -1**].<sup>23</sup> In 2001, Cambodia passed a law that none of the Khmer Rouge leaders could be exempt from legal prosecution.<sup>24</sup> In sum, political decisions in Cambodia were exclusively made by the governing side [**VETO 1999-2012= -1; VETOSAT 1999-2012=n.r.**].

During the conflict period, Khmer Rouge rebels fought the government for control of the entire state of Cambodia and did not struggle for secession or unification with another country [**EXBORDER 1999-2012=n.r.**]. Accordingly, neither intra-state borders nor the allocation of competences among the political levels were relevant in the conflict [**INBORDER 1999-2012=n.r.; COMPETEN 1999-2012=n.r.**].

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20 Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia, <http://www.eccc.gov.kh/en/> (24 Mar 2015).

21 Namely, former ministers of Democratic Kampuchea Ieng Sary, Ieng Thirith, Nuon Chea and Khieu Samphan.

22 Freedom House Countries at the crossroads Report 2004: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/countries-crossroads/2004/cambodia#.VQv6uuHzHOI> (20 Mar 2015).

23 In its report on 2003, Freedom House states: “Cambodia’s 2003 parliamentary elections were marred by restrictions on opposition access to radio and television and allegations of intimidation of voters and activists in the countryside” (<https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2004/cambodia#.VTEdi5OynXE> (17 Apr 2015)). According to the report for 2009, Cambodia was not an electoral democracy (<https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2009/cambodia#.VTEhu5OynXE> (17 Apr 2015)). See also: <http://www.freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/Country%20Ratings%20and%20Status%2C%201973-2014%20%28FINAL%29.xls> (10 Oct 2014).

24 <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2006/cambodia#.VOx84S6DjOI> (24 Feb 2015).

Under the DK regime from 1975 to 1978, the Khmer Rouge attempted to build a communist peasant state, leaning on Maoist ideology and characterized by economic and political autarky (Curtis 1998: 4). As David P. Chandler (1991: 1) has stated, “the DK regime abolished money, evacuated cities and towns, prohibited religious practices, suspended formal education, [...] collectivized eating after 1977, and made everyone wear peasant costumes”. After the adoption of the new Cambodian constitution in 1993, the country abandoned the socialist planned economy model and committed itself to the free market economy, integrating into the global economic order and even adopting a neoliberal economy (Louth 2015; St John 2006: 60f). The economy can therefore be regarded as an important conflict issue for the warring parties, which was clearly resolved in favor of the government side [**ECONOMY 1999-2012= -1**].<sup>25</sup>

Khmers from southern Vietnam and ethnic Vietnamese have both always been explicit targets under the DK regime and in later Khmer Rouge attacks during the conflict period. For the post-war period, Freedom House (2004) reports that these groups have also been “subjected to widespread animosity and racist propaganda”. However, the discrimination against the Vietnamese minority in Cambodia cannot be regarded as a relevant conflict issue for the war. Also, the Khmer Rouge aimed at extinguishing all economic, status-related and intellectual class distinctions in Cambodian society (cf. Chandler 1991; Kiernan 1996). Although the Khmer Rouge engaged in ethnic cleansing during their rule (Kiernan 1996: 251ff.), the fundamental social and economic transformation attempted by the Khmer Rouge cannot be regarded as a struggle for the promotion of specific ethnic, religious or professional groups, other than the organization itself [**SPECPRO 1999-2012=n.r.**].

No further issues were disputed by the parties during or after the war [**ISSUE 1999-2012=n.r.**; **ISSUE2 1999-2012=n.r.**; **NEWCON1 1999-2012=n.r.**; **NEWCON2 1999-2012=n.r.**]. As the only relevant disputed issue, the matter of Cambodia’s economic order was clearly resolved in favor of the government side; there were no compromises implemented after the end of the war [**BENEFIT 1999-2012=n.r.**; **BENEFIT2 1999-2012=n.r.**].

In sum, the scale of compromise after the civil war was completely in favor of the government side [**COMPROM 1999-2012= -1**].

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25 The transformation of the Cambodian economy after the Khmer Rouge legacy of 1975-1978 was a long-term process that has been developing over a period of more than 20 years. However, as only the maximum demands of the conflicting parties are of concern for this study, the inability of the Khmer Rouge to influence the Cambodian economy according to its ideology is coded as a victory for the government.

## Stability of peace

Ever since the de-facto dissolution of the Khmer Rouge in 1998, a renewed war has not occurred in the country [SAMEWAR 1999-2012=0; DATESAME 1999-2012=n.r.; PEACMON1=168]. Very few of the former Khmer Rouge leaders were brought to trial and a general atmosphere of impunity has persisted in the country (cf. HRW 2012: 5-6). Hun Sen was able to hold on to power, and no attempts to overthrow the ruling government occurred from 1998 up to the end of this investigation period [ANYWAR 1999-2012=0; DATEANY 1999-2012=n.r.; PEACMON2=168].

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## Annex

Table 2: Troops in post-war Cambodia (IISS 1998-2013)

	<i>Govern-</i>	<i>Khmer Rouge</i>	<i>Ratio</i>	
1998	139,000	600–1,000	231.67	1
1999	149,000	n.d.		
2000	140,000	n.d.		
2001	140,000	n.d.		
2002	125,000	n.d.		
2003	125,000	n.d.		
2004	124,300	n.d.		
2005	124,300	1,000–2,000	124.3	1
2006	124,300	1,000–2,000	124.3	1
2007	124,300	1,000–2,000	124.3	1
2008	124,300	n.d.		
2009	124,300	n.d.		
2010	124,300	n.d.		
2011	124,300	n.d.		
2012				