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The Politics of Death

Political Violence in Southeast Asia

LIT

Sorpong Peou

From the Battlefield into the State: Post-UNTAC Political Violence and the Limits of Peacebuilding

Introduction

This chapter examines the correlation between political structures, political change and levels of internal political violence, using Cambodia as a case study. Research on Southeast Asia has overlooked this correlation as few scholars have ever made such a link. William Case, for instance, points out that semi-democratic regimes tend to foster political stability and thus low levels of political violence.[1] Others attribute high levels of political stability to the parliamentary systems that states in the region adopted.[2] My work on Cambodian politics is based on the hypothesis that the higher the level of vulnerability perceived by state leaders the higher the level of political violence. Most repressive systems, such as the one under the Khmer Rouge leadership, experienced extremely high levels of perceived vulnerability and high levels of political violence.[3]

This study argues that ethnicity does not necessarily incite political violence. Although they are more ethnically diverse than Cambodia, both Singapore and Malaysia have now proved to be less prone to political violence; in fact, they are the most stable illiberal democracies in Southeast Asia. Cambodia is ethnically homogenous, and yet has experienced higher levels of political violence. Political structures matter more than ethnicity. If the Philippines suffers from a high level of political violence, its presidential system may explain why this is the case, whereas the parliamentary systems of Singapore and Malaysia may help explain their political stability. The ar-

1 William F. Case, 'Can the "Halfway House" Stand? Semi-democracy and Elite Theory in Three Southeast Asian Countries', *Comparative Politics* (July 1996): 437-464.

2 Fred W. Riggs, 'Bureau Power in Southeast Asia', *Asian Journal of Political Science*, 1(1) (1993): 3-28; Mohamed Jawhar Hassan, 'The Nexus between Democracy and Stability: The Case of Southeast Asia', *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 18(2) (1996): 163-174.

3 Sorpong Peou, *Intervention and Change in Cambodia: Toward Democracy?* (New York and Singapore: St Martin's Press and Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2000).

gument that democratic transition has proved to be violence-prone is valid to an extent, but the process of democratization in Cambodia during the 1990s shows an overall downward trend in political violence, especially when compared with the revolutionary totalitarianism of the Khmer Rouge regime and the socialist dictatorship of the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK)/State of Cambodia (SOC).

The case of Cambodia seems to show a correlation between trends toward elective dictatorship in parliamentary systems (in which governments are able to act as they please so long as they control parliaments and their executive power is checked only by the need to win subsequent elections) and lower levels of political violence, apparently because state leaders perceive their level of vulnerability to be lower as challenges from within the state and society are less capable of mobilizing collective action. This does not mean that appalling socio-economic conditions matter little, since the persistence of poverty and deprivation may give rise to political violence, especially if the opposition is effective in mobilizing collective action threatening the ruling party's authority.

Forms, incidents, phases and cycles of violence

Evidence from Cambodia invalidates any proposition that there is almost no political violence in closed, or totalitarian political regimes. Over the past six decades, this country adopted different types of regimes, all of which engaged in political violence, although the levels of political violence varied from regime to regime. Violence under Prince Norodom Sihahouk's paternalistic authoritarian regime intensified toward the end of the 1960s, culminating in the coup that removed him from power. The level of violence from 1970 to 1975 during the new republican dictatorship of President Lon Nol increased dramatically. His Khmer Republic committed crimes against humanity when its troops slaughtered thousands of ethnic Vietnamese after the coup against Sihanouk. They were rounded up, arrested, tortured and shot; their bodies were mutilated and floated in the Mekong River. About 7,000 of them were accused of treason and 800 executed.[4] In 1970 alone, about 200,000 ethnic Vietnamese were expelled from Cambodia. Within the next four years, around 120,000 Vietnamese left Cambodia for Vietnam.[5] In comparative terms, the Khmer

4 Elisabeth Becker, *When the War Was Over* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1986), pp. 139-40.

5 Judith Banister and Paige Johnson, 'After the Nightmare: The Population of Cambodia', in *Genocide and Democracy in Cambodia: The Khmer Rouge, the United Nations, and the International Community*, ed. by Ben Kiernan (New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 1993), p. 72.

Republic era witnessed more deaths than the Sihanoukist regime: close to a million Cambodians must have perished.[6] After that, the Khmer Rouge's revolutionary totalitarian regime claimed somewhere between 1 million and 1.5 million lives. David Chandler estimates that 'more than million Cambodians, or one in seven, probably died from malnutrition, overwork and misdiagnosed or mistreated illness' and that '[a]t least 100,000, and probably more, were executed for crimes against the state'.[7] Other writers, such as Yale historian Ben Kiernan and journalist John Pilger, assess the death toll at around 1.5 million Cambodians, between 300,000 and 400,000 of whom were executed.[8] Although it is hard to figure out the exact number of people who died from 1975 to 1979, a figure somewhere between 1 million and 1.5 million (out of a population of about 6 million) has often been cited.

The PRK/SOC regime was far less violently repressive. In 1979, the occupation Vietnamese force established a military intelligent unit, known as 'T-6', used for interrogation and torture. After the Vietnamese departure in late 1989, the unit was renamed 'S-91', employing over 50 soldiers as guards, interrogators, executioners and investigators. According to the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights (1992), since 'coming to power in 1979, the regime imprisoned thousands of persons for taking part in violent or non-violent activities on behalf of the Khmer Rouge or the non-communist opposition'.[9] Individuals were imprisoned without being given a chance to defend themselves. Arbitrary arrest, intensive interrogation and torture were some of the forms of human rights abuse: 'Beatings—with truncheons, rifle stocks, metal pipes or bamboo sticks—appear to be the most common form of physical abuse in the PRK. They often were supplemented by more sophisticated torture methods, which include applying electric shocks, tightening a metal contraption around the detainees head, blowing lye powder in the prisoner's face and—commonly—placing a plastic bag over a detainee's head until he or she faints.'[10]

6 Ibid.

7 David Chandler, *Brother Number One: A Political Biography of Pol Pot* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992), p. 4.

8 See his critical review of Chandler's Brother Number One: A Political Biography of Pol Pot in the Journal of Asian Studies, 52(4) (1993), p. 1077.

9 Amnesty International, *State of Cambodia: Human Rights Developments, 1 October 1991 to 31 January 1992* (London: Amnesty International Publications, 1992), pp. 6-18, 21-23.

10 Floyd Abrams, *Kampuchea: After the Worst* (New York, NY: Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, 1985), p. 36.

Evidence, however, shows that the overall level of political violence in the 1990s has declined remarkably. It is necessary to trace the democratic process back to 23 October 1991 when four Cambodian factions, the SOC, the Khmer Rouge, the royalist faction known as FUNCINPEC, and the Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF) signed the Paris Peace Agreements and invited the United Nations to send in a multinational mission known as the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) to organize and hold a national election, which took place on 23 May 1993. The Agreements envisioned a transition from the battlefield to the ballot box, having taken into account the violent history of Cambodia. In fact, the Agreements' ultimate aim was to reduce political violence by promoting human rights and democracy in the country. Article 15 stated that Cambodia would adopt, among other things, 'effective measures to ensure that the policies and practices of the past shall never be allowed to return'.[11]

Several indicators may shed light on the overall positive trend in the 1990s. First, political violence against members of the media sector increased between 1994 and 1997, but has since subsided. Numerous journalists have been physically assaulted and received death threats as well as unfair jail sentences for having criticized government leaders and their policies. Defamation was treated as a criminal rather than a civil matter.[12] News offices that did not belong to the CPP-controlled government also came under violent attack.[13] In the first three months following the 1997 violence, opposition newspapers decided to suspend their editions, primarily due to political intimidation.[14] Even after that, journalists remained nervous, fearing the retribution that was common in the years prior to the coup.[15] They remained under threat of violence, and occasionally received threatening

11 United Nations, *Agreements on a Comprehensive Political Settlement of the Cambodia Conflict: Paris 23 October 1991* (New York: UN Department of Public Information, 1992), p. 12.

12 In 1996, Hem Vipheak, editor of *New Liberty*, was convicted in a case of defamation or violating Article 63 of the Criminal Law and was sentenced to one year in prison and was forced to pay a fine of US$2,000. The prison term would be doubled if he failed to make the payment.

13 Such attacks included those against the offices of *Monaseka Khmer* on 2 June 1995, *Morning News* on 8 September 1995, and *New Liberty News* on 23 October 1996.

14 For further details, see Human Rights Watch, *World Report* (Cambodia section) (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1995, 1996, 1997 and 1998).

15 Interview with opposition newspaper publisher Dam Sithik of *Moneaksekar Khmer* in August 2002.

phone calls, although there was no documented physical violence against a journalist in 2003 and 2004.[16] Up until the end of 2004, legal action by the government against journalists continued, but the number of cases declined. In 1998, only five cases of closure, suspension and visa revocation against journalists were reported.[17] In much of 1999, the government suspended the issuance of new press licences and sent at least four warnings to newspapers alleged to have criticized the King, Hun Sen and Ranariddh, and summoned only one newspaper to court. In 2000, there were only three arrests,[18] two cases of short-term press closure and one threat of suspension.[19] The following year saw only one case of defamation against three journalists belonging to *The Cambodia Daily*.[20] In 2002, there were several cases of threats, suspensions, detentions and lawsuits. In September, two journalists were arrested, simply because of a report on customs officials' confiscation of a car belonging to the chief of national police. In October, Beehive Radio—the country's most independent news outlet—was ordered to stop broadcasting news live from Radio Free Asia and Voice of America,[21] and was closed, but then reopened shortly after. The total number of journalists killed declined. Six journalists had been killed in Cambodia between 1994 and 1997. During

16 It took me about two hours to get an interview with Dam Sithik, the publisher of *Moneaksekar Khmer*, as he was trying to change the meeting place. The Ministry of Information suspended his newspaper for 30 days. Dam Sithik filed a lawsuit against the Ministry, claiming that he was losing about US$300 a day. He did not want to meet with me in his newspaper office, choosing instead to meet me in a restaurant where he could be surrounded by glass walls. 'They hate me because I know their stories. Sitting here is more comfortable because I can see when someone approaches me,' he said.

17 In September 1998, the Ministry of Information ordered the closure of FM105, a private radio station owned by an unsuccessful opposition candidate. In October, *Udom Katte Khmer* (Khmer Ideal, an opposition newspaper) was suspended, because of the allegation that it published stories detrimental to national security and political stability. The Ministry also threatened to revoke an American reporter's visa and to suspend two American-owned newspapers, *Cambodia Daily* and *Phnom Penh Post*.

18 Three journalists were arrested in connection with the armed clash between government troops and those of Cambodian Freedom Fighters (CFF) and charged with siding with the CFF.

19 According to the Ministry of Information, four journalists died of diseases in 2000.

20 The three journalists were sued because they published an article alleging that foreign minister Hor Nam Hong had a role in the Khmer Rouge regime. They were ordered by the Phnom Penh Municipal Court to pay the minister US$6,500 in compensation and a US$1,280 fine to the government. In fact, the minister was in charge of the Beng Trabek re-education camp in 1977 under the Khmer Rouge regime.

21 *Cambodia Daily*, 25 October 2002, p. 1.

1997 alone, at least three journalists were killed.[22] Although none of the killers has been brought to justice, fewer and fewer journalists have been murdered. Most recently, on 18 October 2003, a pro-FUNCINPEC reporter, Chuor Chetharith, was gunned down outside his office in broad daylight.

The overall level of political violence against opposition parties decreased in the period 1992-2003. The bloodiest period of the 1990s was in 1997, when supporters of FUNCINPEC and CPP leaders engaged in a military confrontation that led to the downfall of First Prime Minister Norodom Ranariddh and the destruction of his army. Before the 1998 election, 22 politically motivated killings took place, but this number represented a marked decrease in violence from the 1993 election, which claimed at least 200 lives. The overall number of deaths appears to have decreased from 1998 to 2002, a period leading to the commune election. In 1999, there was a zero-death rate, but the following year witnessed the killing of four political activists, as the commune election was being considered. The number increased to 12 in 2001. The period from January to 3 February 2002 alone saw five deaths. The number of deaths in the three-month period leading to polling day was 13 for the 1998 election, compared to only 11 for the 2002 commune election. Several killings before the 1998 election also involved torture and mutilation, whereas only one such death occurred in the 2002 election.[23] During the commune election in 2002, there was 'a decrease in acts of violence and intimidation compared to previous national polls'.[24] Moreover, the election saw less severe political intimidation (when compared with the 1993 and 1998 national elections), and 'political parties were [also] able to resolve disputes arising from polling day and vote counting in a manner that avoided further conflict' and there were 'fewer retribution problems than in 1998'.[25] The 2003 election saw even less violence.[26]

22 Michael Senior, a Canadian-Cambodian teacher and newscaster, was the last journalist killed in 1997. He was killed in front of his wife while photographing lootings on one of Phnom Penh's streets during the July factional fighting. Chet Duong Dararith, journalist for the opposition *Fighter News*, was killed in a violent grenade attack on 30 March 1997. Also killed since 1993 were print journalists Thou Char Mongkol from *Antarakum News*, Noun Chan from opposition *Khmer Conscience News*, reporter Sao Chan Dara from *Koh Santepheap News* and Thun Bunly from opposition newspaper *Khmer Ideal*.

23 Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Human Rights in Cambodia, *Commune Council Elections 2002* (undated), p. 6.

24 Ibid., p. 1.

25 Ibid., p. 7.

26 Peter Leuprecht, *Report of UN Secretary-General's Special Representative to Cambodia*, UN Doc. A/58/317, 22 August 2003, paragraph 19.

Overall, the most violent years were 1993 and 1997. The level of political violence has declined noticeably since the 1998 election. This overall positive trend suggests two things: political violence tends to intensify in the period running up to the election; however, each election witnessed a reduced level of political violence.

Agents of political violence

The main agents of political violence are the factions dominating the state and their loyalists, especially those elements affiliated with the security and military apparatus supporting the élites within the ruling party who are seeking to maintain regime security.

A common pattern of violence in recent Cambodian history can be discerned. During the Lon Nol period, thousands of civilians became victims of indiscriminate attacks by government troops. Villages, monasteries and schools were destroyed by aircraft with bombs and napalm. The Pol Pot leadership is said to be responsible for the violence during the Khmer Rouge regime. Ben Kiernan has traced Pol Pot's attempt to dominate the Cambodian Communist Party since the early 1960s.[27] In his view, 'There can be no doubt that the evidence also points clearly to a systemic use of violence against the population by that *chauvinist section* of the revolutionary movement that was led by Pol Pot'.[28] At the same time, Chandler, Kiernan and Boua recognize that the killings that occurred during the Khmer Rouge regime were carried out by low-ranking cadres. As they put it: 'A good deal of evidence from 1977 and 1978, indeed, supports the contention that in these years [the Khmer Rouge] was tearing itself apart. Power in the countryside was usually exercised by young, illiterate, heavily armed men and women, who ate better and did less work than anyone else.'[29] Much of the violence was apparently carried out by them, with and without the orders of their superiors.

27 Ben Kiernan, *How Pol Pot Came to Power: A History of Communism in Kampuchea, 1930-1975* (London: Verso, 1985), pp. 198, 241.

28 Ben Kiernan, 'Vietnam and the Governments and the People of Kampuchea', *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, 2(4) (1979), p. 19.

29 David Chandler, Ben Kiernan and Chanthou Boua, *Pol Pot Plans the Future: Confidential Leadership Documents from Democratic Kampuchea, 1976-1977* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Southeast Asian Studies, Monograph Series 33, 1988), p. xiii.

During the 1980s, when Cambodia was still at war, the armed factions were the SOC and three resistance factions—the Khmer Rouge, FUNCINPEC, and the KPNLF—backed by Western states, China, the United Nations and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). The resistance factions formed the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea fighting the SOC backed by the Soviet Union and Vietnam. Under the PRK/SOC regime, political violence was mostly committed by those loyal to the political faction dominated by Prime Minister Hun Sen. The three anti-SOC factions themselves also engaged in acts of violence in the areas under their control.

In the 1990s, political violence was committed by members of the CPP-dominated government, with at least the tacit approval or personal sanction of its leaders. Several institutions, including members of the security and military apparatus, as well as Hun Sen's bodyguards, were responsible. Before the war ended in 1998, the military apparatus committed much of the violence. Human Rights Watch/Asia Human Rights Watch Arms Project reported violations of human rights in Cambodia in the forms of violations of the laws of war, extra-judicial executions, attacks on civilians, pillage and destruction of civilian property, violations of international human rights law, forced conscription, military detention of civilians and secret prisons. It wrote that the armed forces 'show little concern for insulating civilian populations from its conduct of hostilities; indeed, it is civilians who typically suffer the most in the imprecise area bombardments that have constituted the main action of the army against the guerrilla forces'.[30]

After the mid-1990s, the security apparatus began to become more actively involved in committing violence. During the fighting that removed Prince Ranariddh from power in July 1997, UN reports confirmed that both paratroopers of Special Forces Regiment 911 and the Gendarmerie (military police) were directly involved in the fighting against the royalist forces, as well as in the killing and torturing of non-CPP elements.[31] The police forces led by National Police Chief General Hok Lundy, most loyal to Hun Sen, were also directly involved in this incident. As late as February 2003, Hok Lundy publicly affirmed that his forces were prepared to 'take down' any group of demonstrators who refused to accept the forthcoming [2003] election's results.[32]

Hun Sen's own bodyguards have also been implicated in various acts of political violence against members of the opposition. For instance, he has been accused by the Sam Rainsy Party of being responsible for the deadly attack on 30 March 1997, citing a FBI report implicating him. According to a US Senate report dated 10 October 1999 and based on evidence from FBI reporting, press accounts and numerous interviews in Cambodia, members of Hun Sen's Bodyguard Force 'participated in the planning and execution' of the attack. The report added that, 'Hun Sen, being one of the two people over the Bodyguard Force, must have known and approved of the attack'.[33]

It is difficult to offer any concrete evidence about the government's role in political violence. In some cases, the killers may have been eliminated after their missions were completed. For instance, after the violent death of Chea Vichea (a union leader gunned down on 22 January 2004), two of Hun Sen's bodyguards were mysteriously killed; their bodies were quickly cremated, but the police were told to 'ignore' their deaths.[34] An investigation of killings that occurred throughout Cambodia from January 1997 to October 1998, for instance, showed that 263 people were allegedly killed by members of the police, gendarmerie, military, militia, bodyguard units or the civil service during this period. The greatest numbers of suspected offenders were soldiers, who made up roughly half of the perpetrators. Another 22 per cent were police officers, 14 per cent were members of the militia, 3 per cent were gendarmes, 3 per cent were civil servants and 6 per cent were mixed groups (bodyguard units and militia, for example). But not one of the 209 suspected perpetrators was brought to justice.[35] Some abusive military officers might have been promoted to higher ranks. Although there is no clear correlation between the level of violence and promotion in the military, it may be worth noting that the number of generals was 2,000 in 1994 and was reduced to only 300 before 1997, but has since increased to 800 (each general with a command of no more than 100 soldiers, as the total number of real soldiers is estimated to be at fewer than 100,000).

30 Human Rights Watch/Asia Human Rights Watch Arms Project, *Cambodia At War* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1995), p. 44.

31 Thomas Hammarberg, 'Memorandum to the Royal Government of Cambodia: Evidence of Summary of Executions, Torture and Missing Persons since 2-7 July 1997' (unpublished, 21 August 1997), pp. 25-28.

32 *Phnom Penh Post*, 28 February-13 March 2003, p. 7.

33 See http://www.cambodiapolitics.org/doc_30_march_1997/siga_101099.pdf (accessed 22 September 2004).

34 *Cambodia Daily*, 10 February 2004.

35 Human Rights Watch, 'Impunity in Cambodia: How Human Rights Offenders Escape Justice: A Report by Adhoc, Licadho and Human Rights Watch', *Cambodia* 11(3) (June 1999), see Appendix A.

Motives and strategies

It is extremely difficult to determine the underlying motives for the use of political violence in Cambodia during the 1990s. Under the Khmer Rouge regime, one could argue that its ruthless strategies were driven by the need to build a powerful Khmer nation. Others may also contend that the regime sought to build an egalitarian society. Whatever ideology the Khmer Rouge may have adopted, it cannot be said that the political regime in the 1990s had a Marxist vision, as members of the opposition claimed. Sam Rainsy, a former member of FUNCINPEC expelled from the party, who then formed his own party known as the Khmer Nation Party (KNP) later renamed the Sam Rainsy Party (SRP), often talked about Pol Pot's legacy and compared Hun Sen to Pol Pot. The battle was seen as one between former Khmer Rouge 'communists' led by Hun Sen and 'true democrats' or 'liberals'.[36] Rainsy's goal was to 'dismantle the communist-type system, where the ruling party and state structures were "intertwined"'.[37]

There is no evidence to suggest that the Hun Sen regime has any Marxist vision for the country, to the extent that Pol Pot or the PRK/SOC did. During the 1998 election, the CPP promised to promote the policy of national reconciliation to achieve peace. It pledged to eliminate social problems such as corruption, theft, sex and drug trafficking, and to undertake a free market economy, ensure economic stability, attract foreign investment and seek foreign assistance with the aim of constructing the country and of raising the pay of civil servants and armed forces. It promised to strengthen, respect, and defend the constitution, respect human rights and ensure the rights of all people. It stated that it would also practice free multiparty democracy and freedom of the press. During the 2003 election, its platform included its commitment to a multiparty liberal system, the conduct of free and fair elections, as well as the promotion of human rights and the rule of law.

One of the CPP leaders' motivations is to ensure their personal and regime security by maintaining and maximizing material power. The distinction between security and power needs to be made. The lust for power has commonly been accepted by some scholars as the main explanatory variable. Ben Kiernan, for instance, warns against 'dangers of unbridled lust for power',[38] I argue that security is a more powerful explanatory variable because power is difficult to measure. Security can be explained in a number of ways. Hun Sen and his loyalists are known for their corruption. Losing power without resorting to any violence would threaten their survival or security. Not only might they be subject to criminal investigations regarding their corruption, but they might also be subject to criminal investigations regarding their historical background as former Khmer Rouge elements. Hun Sen himself was a military officer (perhaps a major or colonel) commanding a 1,000-strong regiment under the Khmer Rouge regime and fled to Vietnam only when Pol Pot sought to purge him. He has always sought to minimize his role at that time and even claimed that he was not a Khmer Rouge solider.

Although it is difficult to gauge personal and regime security as Hun Sen's ultimate motive, evidence seems to show that this has been the case. For instance, after the 2003 election, the Alliance of Democrats formed by the SRP and FUNCINPEC refused to recognize Hun Sen as the next prime minister. Less than a month later, he seemed more willing to step down, as the last resort, and would agree to settle for the position as president of the National Assembly, but so long as he were allowed to choose his own successor. The CPP president, Chea Sim, was his main rival and not on his mind; however, Sok An, a senior minister in charge of the Council of Ministers, was.[39]

Hun Sen's concern about his personal security led him to adopt strategies that would keep him in power without completely monopolizing it, as long as he could remain prime minister. Hun Sen's strategies of violence for security purposes have a common pattern: namely, to weaken his political opponents by frightening them into submission and by dividing and conquering them. After the 1993 election, the CPP refused to accept the outcome and subsequently forced the winning party, FUNCINPEC, to share power in a coalition government, with Prince Ranariddh as first prime minister and Hun Sen as second prime minister. Within this power-sharing arrangement, Hun Sen made sure his co-premier did not have any real political clout. Meanwhile, Hun Sen sought the destruction of FUNCINPEC's political allies; the KPNLF whose political party was called the Buddhist Liberal Democratic Party (BLDP) came under attack, and Hun Sen took advantage of its internal

36 Sam Rainsy, 'Pol Pot's Legacy Lives On', *Wall Street Journal*, 20 April 1998.
37 Nate Thayer and Rodney Tasker, 'Cambodia: Unfree and Unfair', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 13 August 1998, p. 17.
38 Ben Kiernan, *The Pol Pot Regime* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), p. 465.
39 *Khmer Intelligence*, 21 August 2003.

splits. Hand-grenades were thrown at the BLDP's gatherings in 1995, injuring a number of its members. The BLDP no longer exists.

As the BLDP weakened, the CPP under Hun Sen quietly turned against members of his coalition partner. Late in 1994, Hun Sen allegedly persuaded Prince Ranariddh to kill the FUNCINPEC minister of finance, Sam Rainsy, but the Prince objected to the idea.[40] In 1995, Foreign Minister Norodom Sirivudh (FUNCINPEC) was then accused of plotting to assassinate Hun Sen; consequently, he was stripped of his parliamentary immunity, arrested, jailed, forced into exile in France and sentenced *in absentia* to 10 years in prison. In July 1997, Hun Sen succeeded in removing Prince Ranariddh from office as first prime minister and took charge of government affairs. The royalists were decimated militarily and have since then been militarily powerless.

At the same time, the CPP sought to prevent any credible opposition parties from being formed. For instance, it consistently refused to recognize former finance minister Sam Rainsy's newly formed Khmer Nation's Party (KNP) and prevented this group from opening party offices at the provincial level, for various reasons. Between May and June 1996, three KNP members were killed; the most prominent of them was a former journalist for the *Odamkatek Khmer* newspaper critical of government policies. On 30 March 1997, a group of demonstrators led by Sam Rainsy came under a grenade attack, which killed about 19 people and injured approximately 150.[41] Although the KNP was then changed to the Sam Rainsy Party (SRP), which became recognized and has engaged in the last three elections, the party has been subject to political repression. As recently as July 2004, Hun Sen openly accused the opposition party of secretly running an 'illegal army on the model of the CPP' (Cambodian Freedom Fighters whose coup attempt had been crushed) and declared that 'serious evidence' would allow the prime minister to lift Sam Rainsy's parliamentary immunity and to arrest the latter.

Whenever the SRP and FUNCINPEC joined forces to challenge the CPP, Hun Sen sought to divide them. After the 2003 election, the two opposition parties formed the Alliance of Democrats, which seems to have gained popular support and refused to accept Hun Sen as prime minister; Hun Sen rejected the idea of a tripartite coalition government and refused to negotiate

40 *Khmer Intelligence*, 23 August 2003.

41 For facts about the incident and indications of responsibility, see 'Excerpts from a statement by Sam Rainsy issued in Bangkok on 17 October 1997', http://www.cambodiapolitics.org/ca_report/cambo_ag_report.pdf

with the Alliance, claiming that it 'died on the very day of its birth'. He then sought to abolish the current two-thirds majority rule in parliament by amending the constitution to allow the formation of a new government by a 50 per cent majority and to 'buy' at least 14 members of parliament (MPs) from the SRP and FUNCINPEC in order to help him move forward with his plan to remain as prime minister and to allow the assembly to meet the seven-tenths quorum (87 MPs) in any meeting. As Hun Sen faced stiff resistance from the Alliance, he approached Nhek Bun Chhay, FUNCINPEC vice-president of the senate, to persuade Prince Ranariddh to form a CPP-FUNCINPEC government. When this strategy failed, Hun Sen considered the possibility of a 'two-and-a-half-party' government, but then settled for a CPP-FUNCINPEC coalition by agreeing to give the royalists a large number of cabinet posts. Hun Sen succeeded in breaking up the Alliance, as the SRP and FUNCINPEC turned against each other, yet again.

As FUNCINPEC was militarily disarmed after the violence in 1997 and the SRP has now been kept out of the current government, Hun Sen apparently sought to consolidate his political power within the CPP. He first got rid of Chea Sophara (governor of Phom Penh, who was seen as becoming increasingly popular and having political ambitions to become a future prime minister) by seeking to demote him to the position of ambassador to Burma. After the 2003 election, Hun Sen prevented Chea Sim and his supporters from conducting any negotiations with the Alliance. He wanted Chea Sim to resign.[42] His concern about the intra-party challenge to his candidacy as prime minister grew after at least eight CPP MPs said they would not support him for another five-year term. On 2 July 2004, the CPP Standing Committee held an extraordinary meeting, with 16 members present but without CPP Chief Chea Sim and his brother-in-law Sar Kheng. Hun Sen is reported to have said that he was now the boss when it came to deciding who should be allowed to remain in or join the new government. On 13 July, Chea Sim was forced out of the country; approximately 20 pro-Chea Sim CPP MPs went into hiding. There were also rumours that Chea Sim might be forced to step down as president of the CPP in the future, but would be allowed to stay as president of the senate.

In short, the underlying motives for the use of political violence were neither driven by any grand ideology nor by the national interests of the country. Personal and regime security seems to be the ruling political élites' most immediate concern.

42 *Khmer Intelligence*, 21 September 2003.

The roots of political violence

There are several possible variables that help shed light on the political violence in Cambodia: cultural, ideological and historical factors, socio-economic conditions, political institutions and power structures. The Cambodia case shows that different levels of political violence can be correlated with levels of perceived vulnerability, which also depend on these factors. The peak periods of political violence in 1993 and 1997 reveal that the country's cultural and historical factors as well as weak political institutions encouraged or motivated political leaders, particularly the CPP under Hun Sen, to use armed factions loyal to them to suppress their political opponents; however, they do not tell us why trends of political violence fluctuated and declined. Neither can the country's socio-economic conditions alone shed much light on trends in political violence.

Cultural, ideological and historical factors

Cultural, ideological and historical factors have also been treated as independent variables in the study of political violence, but none is completely explanatory. Cultural perspectives have some explanatory value: they help us reflect on the continuity of violence that has afflicted this country for decades, if not centuries. Cambodian cultural attitudes toward violence have been analysed by scholars, who extrapolate that it is a culture of violence, known as 'warrior heritage'.[43] This perspective can also be found in the work of a former politician named Bunchan Mol, who wrote *Charet Khmer* (Khmer practice or conduct): 'The Khmer are egoistic, ungrateful indecent, arrogant, non-cooperative, revengeful, unwilling to accept defeat and to end a combat until the opponent is totally destroyed.'[44] The notion of defeat and victory explains why the factions have not always spared their enemies' lives for fear that the latter will seek retribution. They are egoistic, insecure of their positions, and have a deadly win-lose or zero-sum mindset. Among the scholars who hold this cultural view are Michael Leifer, Abdulgaffa Peang-Meth and Pierre Lizée. Leifer and Peang-Meth maintain that peace in Cambodia is elusive, simply because the Cambodians cannot work together. Genuine compromise and power-sharing among adversaries are difficult to achieve, since these political values are not part of the Indochinese political tradition.[45] Peang-Meth traced Khmer resistance to compromise, thus making 'peace, stability, and democracy very difficult to achieve'.[46] Lizee further asserts that Cambodia's political traditions are dominated by 'factional aggrandizement' and 'violence'.[47] Dominant factions will seek to thwart any reform efforts that endanger the social order where their power rests. They will not accept any challenges to the social order serving their interests.[48]

Cultural perspectives have limited explanatory power, however, because they do not explain variations in political violence. Political ideology seems to have more explanatory value. Racialist ideology may help us understand the genocide committed by the Khmer Rouge regime, as Kiernan suggests. In his work, the two most dominant themes are race and power. Violence and war initiated by the Pol Pot group are correlated with their racialism and their lust for power. In my view, however, racialism also has little explanatory value, since the Khmer Rouge regime's revolutionary totalitarianism was driven less by race than by the need to build an egalitarian society based on the Pol Pot leadership's Marxist vision. Political violence is defined as *objective* and *rational* because the ultimate goal is to dismantle the old society and to build a new one, not just reactive to violent challenges from social forces.[49]

43 Seanglim Bit, *The Warrior Heritage* (El Cerrito: Seanglim Bit, 1991). Some political theorists developed arguments about violence seen as being deeply rooted political culture. Johan Galtung, for instance, sees 'cultural violence' as an aspect of a culture that can be used to legitimize violence in its direct or structural form. Symbolic violence built into a culture does not kill or maim like direct violence or the violence built into the structure. However, it is used to legitimize either or both. See Johan Galtung, 'Cultural Violence', *Journal of Peace Research*, 27(3) (1990): 291-305.

44 Bunchan Mol, *Charret Khmer* (Phnom Penh, Cambodia: Residence No.79, Hem Cheam Boulevard, 1973), p. 217.

45 Michael Leifer, 'Power-sharing and Peacemaking in Cambodia?', *SAIS Review*, 12(1) (1992): 139-153.

46 Abdulgaffa Peang-Meth, 'Understanding the Khmer: Sociological-Cultural Observations', *Asian Survey*, xxxi(5) (1991), p. 455.

47 Pierre Lizée, 'Building Peace: The Challenges and Contradictions of the Cambodian Peace Process' (Ph.D. dissertation, York University, September 1995).

48 Ibid., pp. 3-4.

49 Craig Etcheson, *The Rise and Demise of Democratic Kampuchea* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1984), pp. 220-212; on ideological genocide, see Helen Fein, 'Revolutionary and Anti-revolutionary Genocides: A Comparison of State Murders in Democratic Kampuchea, 1975 to 1979, and Indonesia, 1965-1966', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 35(4) (1993), pp. 796-823. This argument goes back to Marx, Engels and Lenin. While they, in the course of years, adopted a more moderate position regarding the use of violence, both Marx and Engels initially considered violence an option, if only as an in-

Much of the violence committed by Khmer Rouge was directed at people of Khmer origin, most notably former government officials and enemies of the state.[50] As an ideological root of violence, communism helps explain why the socialist regimes were responsible for 100 million deaths during the Cold War.[51] The animosities between the CPP and its opponents partly resulted from the latter's deep distrust of the former's socialist style of leadership, as noted earlier.

History also appears to have some explanatory merit. Political violence in the 1990s could be understood in terms of the historical animosities between the former armed factions, who not only shared different ideologies but also a deep sense of mutual mistrust. The CPP leadership's deep distrust of the Khmer Rouge can be traced back to the late 1970s. Hun Sen and other CPP leaders (such as Heng Samrin and Chea Sim) faced ruthless purges by Pol Pot. Throughout the 1980s, the PRK/SOC regime sought to legitimize its political rule by building for itself a 'messianic' image. The establishment of the National Union Front for the Salvation of Kampuchea bears out this point. The PRK/SOC regularly portrayed the Pol Pot regime as 'genocidal' and lauded itself for its historic role in liberating Cambodians from the totalitarian yoke of 'Pol-Potism'.[52] Throughout the 1990s, the CPP continued to present itself as the one party that saved Cambodia from 'genocide'. During the 1993 elections, its leaders sought to enhance their party's authority by demonizing its enemies, especially the royalists and Khmer Rouge.[53] Hun Sen defended his 1997 coup by declaring that the royalists were 'traitors'

strument of secondary importance desirable when there are no other alternatives to change to system. Lenin, however, developed a more radical viewpoint when the possibility of a revolution in Russia became real. As the years went by, he increasingly affirmed not only the use of violence but also the resort to use of terrorist activities. Thus, unlike Marx and Engels, he became an ardent supporter of all types of violence. Raphael Cohen-Almagor, 'Foundations of Violence, Terror and War in the Writings of Marx, Engels and Lenin', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 3(2) (1991), pp. 1-24.

50 See Sorpong Peou's book review on Brother Number One, The Pol Pot Regime and Human Rights in Cambodia, *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* (Winter 1997), pp. 413-425.

51 Stephane Courtois, 'Introduction: The Crimes of Communism', in *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression*, ed. by Stephane Courtois *et al.* (Cambridge, MA & London, UK: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 4.

52 For more background on this, see Harish C. Mehta and Julie B. Mehta, *Hun Sen: Strongman of Cambodia* (Singapore: Graham Brash, 1999).

53 For more details, see Steve Heder and Judy Ledgerwood (eds.), *Propaganda, Politics, and Violence in Cambodia* (New York & London: M.E. Sharpe, 1996).

because of their secret alliance with the Khmer Rouge. Lack of compromise among the factions can also be seen in the way they dug up the dirt on their enemies' past, exposing injustices and vices committed by their opponents and exaggerating their own virtues.

Socio-economic factors

There seems to be a correlation between the level of perceived vulnerability and political violence in the socio-economic context. Whenever Cambodian leaders have felt that they cannot accommodate socio-economic demands, they have tended to use violence to maintain political stability. From 1959 to 1966, Cambodia ran a constant budget deficit, despite the fact that it was self-sufficient in rice production. Although the rate of economic growth from 1960 to 1966 was between 6 and 10 per cent, 1964 was the year when growth began to slacken. By the mid-1960s, growth in agricultural production also began to slow down. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, except for 1964 and 1965, trade deficits persisted. The country's purchasing power eroded from 1954 to 1955 and 1957-1970 to a point well below that in 1953.[54] Sihanouk's growing vulnerability throughout the 1960s coincided with his inability to cope with students' growing demands for jobs. In February 1963, student demonstrations broke out in Siem Reap Province. Growing problems of unemployment triggered the event. The overall economic conditions deteriorated in the early 1970s, when Cambodia started to import rice to feed its own people and had to rely on foreign aid. However, the economic conditions did not reach the stage where political leaders no longer had the capacity to accommodate the needs of the various social and political groups within society, as had been the case for the Khmer Rouge regime after their military victory. Then, in Phnom Penh alone, the new leadership had faced a population of two million refugees who needed food, shelter and medicine. As vulnerable as they were, Khmer Rouge leaders must have seen no better solution than to push them into the countryside where lives could be sustained by subsistence farming. Their vulnerability was compounded by their inability to meet social needs after their victory.[55]

54 Ear Sophal, 'Cambodia's Economic Development in Historical Perspective' (unpublished manuscript), chp. 3.

55 Karl Jackson, 'Cambodia 1977: Gone to Pot', *Asian Survey*, 18(1) (1978), pp. 76-90.

The persistence of political violence in the 1980s and 1990s can be further explained by the regimes' inability to cope with socio-economic pressures. Cambodia remains one of the poorest countries in the world. Its socio-economic conditions are still in bad shape. According to the *Human Development Report* of 1997, when the level of violence in the 1990s was at its peak, Cambodia was ranked 153 out of 175 countries in the human development index (HDI). The percentage of the people living below the poverty line declined only modestly: from about 39 per cent in 1994 to 36.1 per cent in 1997.[56] Cambodia was recently ranked higher—130th—in the *2004 Human Development Report*, with an HDI value of 0.568 in East Asia and the Pacific. But the country was also the worst economic performer in East Asia and the Pacific: its Human Poverty Index-1 value was 42.6 per cent, and the country was ranked 74th among 95 developing countries.[57] Cambodia's annual per-capita income remains less than $300, thus making it extremely difficult, if not impossible, for the political leadership to meet socio-economic needs. Persistent poverty and socio-economic inequality in Cambodian society leave Cambodian democracy vulnerable to repressive violence. Early in 1999, for instance, university students launched picket lines and set fire to tyres in their demands for better employment prospects. Hun Sen's response was to state: 'we have no money'. He wished he could pay the teachers US$3,000 per month, but the harsh reality was that 'it cannot be done'. He added, 'Even if they strangled me or pulled out my fingernails, I would not know what to do'.[58] This helps explain why his regime has not tolerated any serious protests. The killing of union leaders and political opponents (seeking to attack the CPP-dominated government) resulted from the wrath and pre-emptive punishment of CPP elements.

56 For further socioeconomic analysis, see the Ministry of Planning, *Cambodia Human Development Report 1999: Village Economy and Development* (Phnom Penh: Ministry of Planning, October 1999); UNDP, *Cambodia Human Development Report* (Phnom Penh: UNDP, 1997); Chan Sophal *et al.*, *Cambodia: The Challenge of Productive Employment Creation* (Phnom Penh: Cambodia Development Resource Institute, Working Paper 8, January 1999).

57 United Nations Development Programme, 'Country Fact Sheets: Cambodia', http://hdr.undp.org/statistics/data/country_fact_sheets/ cty_fs_KHM.html (accessed on 28 November 2004).

58 Agence France-Presse, 3 February 1999.

Political institutions and power structures

The level of perceived vulnerability can further be correlated with states' structural weakness. The French colonized Cambodia, but never built or strengthened its state. According to Osborne, 'French colonial control had ensured the survival of the royal family and confirmed the importance of the great official families. It had not developed a system of administration, or corps of administrators that could confidently confront the problems of independency. Cambodia's lack of trained administrators, engineers and doctors was shared by many Third World countries emerging from colonial rule'.[59]

After independence, Cambodia never had enough time to build political and social institutions. One great myth about Cambodian politics is the Khmer Rouge regime was highly centralized and enjoyed the peasantry's support.[60] This is a much contested claim. However, there are other studies that find the 'strong Khmer Rouge' thesis untenable. In his article, Serge Thion correctly argues that the regime was highly decentralized.[61] Kiernan also describes Cambodia's village society as 'decentralized', and its economy as 'unintegrated, dominated by subsistence rice cultivation'.[62] Kiernan wrote: 'From the *ashes* of rural Cambodia arose Pol Pot's Communist Party of Kampuchea'.[63] Chandler further recognizes the problem of political transition: 'Revolutionary movements are poorly suited to becoming functioning

59 Milton Osborne, *Sihanouk: Prince of Light, Prince of Darkness* (St. Leonards, New South Wales: Allen & Unwin, 1994), p. 273. Although the French did more for Vietnam than for Cambodia, Vietnam has suffered from similar problems. As Douglas Pike put it, 'Lack of system is the central fact of life about today's society and politics in Vietnam. Ever since the French left, Vietnam has suffered from a serious shortage of technically trained civil servants ... insufficient managerial capacity that has perpetuated the anarchic condition of South Vietnam'. Douglas Pike, *War, Peace and the Viet Cong* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1969), p. 61.

60 Anthony Barnett, 'Democratic Kampuchea: A Highly Centralized Dictatorship', in *Revolution and its Aftermath in Kampuchea: Eight Essays*, ed. by David Chandler (New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asian Studies, 1983), pp. 212-229.

61 Serge Thion, 'The Cambodian Idea of Revolution', in *Revolution and its Aftermath in Kampuchea: Eight Essays*, ed. by David Chandler (New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asian Studies, 1983), pp. 10-33; see also Michael Vickery, 'Democratic Kampuchea: Themes and Variations', in *Revolution and its Aftermath in Kampuchea: Eight Essays*, ed. by David Chandler (New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asian Studies, 1983), pp. 99-135.

62 Kiernan, 1996, p. 5.

63 Kiernan, 1996, p. 19 (italics added).

regimes—the process is painful and contradictory. Revolutionary movements, after all, focus on seizing nations rather than administering them; they are geared toward war. Revolutionaries, for the most part, lack bureaucratic skills and are contemptuous of "government".' In 1975, Cambodia had a 'tiny governing body'.[64] For most observers, the Khmer Rouge regime destroyed almost all of the former state and social institutions, and the PKR had to build everything from scratch.

Political violence in the 1990s cannot be understood unless the structural weakness of the Cambodian state and the presence of armed factions are taken into account. It may be misleading for anyone to describe Cambodia as a country without the state, but it is more appropriate to characterize the state as extremely weak and dominated by one single party under the leadership of Prime Minister Hun Sen. In fact, the French newspaper *Le Figaro* published an article by Francois Hauter, who based his argument on a 'non-published, very strongly worded IMF report presented to Finance Minister Keat Chhon last May [2004]'. According to him, the IMF denounced a drift of Cambodia into a mafia state, afflicted by lawlessness and the ongoing aggravation of poverty.[65]

Political violence does not break out just because political and social institutions are weak, or political leaders behave according to cultural logic, or power contenders have ideological differences, or because they have experienced historical animosities, or because political leaders are unable to meet socio-economic challenges. The most important factor conducive to political violence is the political leadership's growing desperation to secure its own survival and its perceived ability to eliminate serious threats.

The high levels of political violence during the 1993 election and in 1997 show that the SOC/CPP felt most vulnerable to politico-military challenges from the opposition, especially the royalists and the Khmer Rouge. Never before had the CPP leadership felt that it could so easily lose power to its armed enemies, the Khmer Rouge, KPNLP and FUNCINPEC. This may help explain why none of the Cambodian signatories disarmed under UNTAC and why the SOC/CPP unleashed violence on its opponents.[66]

64 Chandler, 1992, p. 112.

65 The original text can be found at http://www.lefigaro.fr/international/20040622.FIG0062.html

66 Heder and Ledgerwood, 1996.

The level of politico-military vulnerability was also high before the violence in July 1997. In spite of its military superiority, the CPP faced growing challenges from his coalition partner, the royalists, who were negotiating with Khmer Rouge remnants; the secret deals between them were perceived as a threat to the CPP. There were allegations that the royalists brought Khmer Rouge soldiers to Phnom Penh in an attempt to boost its military force capable of challenging CPP forces. All this development prompted Hun Sen to take pre-emptive action by removing Ranariddh from office as first prime minister, leading to a so-called 'pre-emptive coup'.[67]

The decline in political violence after 1997 cannot be understood apart from the fact that the CPP under the leadership of Hun Sen has been successful in consolidating power. Hun Sen's enemies have now been kept at bay, but he is far from becoming completely secure, as the rift between him and the Chea Sim faction has deepened.

The political outcomes

The overall quality of Cambodia democracy has improved, especially when compared with the 1980s, although it is difficult to come up with precise measures. Based on the above analysis, it is more accurate to describe the Cambodian regime as one that has become increasingly illiberal but more stable, and yet the parliamentary democratic system remains fragile.

Elective dictatorship seems to have become increasingly evident, especially after 1997. Although the CPP under the Hun Sen leadership and FUNCINPEC have joined hands, thus making the new government look more representative, it is far from clear that the royalists can exercise whatever power they received from the deal with the CPP. The once much-lauded process of decentralization aimed at promoting grass-roots democracy, fostering economic development and reducing poverty has proved to be elusive. Since the commune election, the decentralization process has been effectively thwarted, as power remains concentrated in the hands of the Hun Sen-dominated government, whose chain of command includes the provincial and district authorities, and ultimately village chiefs with strong holds over villagers. CPP-appointed, long-serving village chiefs have not yet been de-

67 Sorpong Peou, 'Hun Sen's Pre-emptive Coup: Causes and Consequences', in *Southeast Asian Affairs 1998*, ed. by Derek da Cunha and John Funston (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1999), pp. 86-102.

mocratically replaced with new ones, as required by the law on decentralization. When the CPP and FUNCINPEC reached a political deal on 27 July 2004, they also agreed to appoint in early 2005 13,000 village chiefs (of whom 70 per cent would be appointed by the CPP) and 13,000 deputies (of whom 70 per cent would be appointed by FUNCINPEC). This agreement would allow their coalition to take full control of the villages.[68] Meanwhile, local 'governments' are not entitled to collect taxes and have little or no say in the management of natural resources within their areas.

Local human rights non-governmental organizations (NGOs) still faced intimidation and threats from military and security forces. The Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defence of Human Rights (LICADHO) presented a report released on 10 December 2002 indicated that the previous few years had revealed 'a clear pattern of intimidation and threats against human rights defenders ... which raises serious concerns about the long-term stability of human rights work'.[69] Before the 2003 election, as noted, Hok Lundy made it clear that his forces would not tolerate any protests against the election results.

Freedom of assembly has been guaranteed by the constitution and the International Treaty on Human Rights ratified by Cambodia, but limits exist. Political rallies and marches, demonstrations and strikes, meetings and seminars were officially permitted, but they faced numerous constraints. According to the Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC), freedom of assembly improved after the violent repression of demonstrators following the 1998 election, but began to deteriorate again in 2002.[70] The police made it clear that they would not hesitate to crack down on 'troublemakers' or demonstrators. Freedom of association increased noticeably, but remained restricted. Between 1991 and 2002, for instance, approximately 1,204 associations and NGOs were created, 736 of which were registered with the Ministry of Interior. Restrictions appeared to be only of a political nature. Those perceived as a threat to the regime were prevented from receiving formal recognition. The Students' Movement for Democracy Organization, for instance, was created in 1998 and then applied for official status several times, without success.

68 *Phnom Penh Post*, 19 November-2 December 2004, pp. 1-2.

69 LICADHO, 'Situation of Human Rights Defenders in Cambodia', Phnom Penh, 10 December 2002.

70 ADHOC, Human Rights Situation Report 2002 (Phnom Penh, 2003).

Respect for the rule of law remains the weakest. There is notable progress in some aspects of the civil liberties protected by the constitution. Religious freedom practised by minorities expanded. By 2003, approximately 500,000 Cham Muslims exercised their freedom of worship, although concern with terrorism still posed a threat to them. But minorities, such as ethnic Vietnamese (numbering between 200,000 and 500,000) often suffered from racial discrimination by political officials and mainstream society, especially during election times when they cast their ballots.

Property and labour rights are not well protected. Land ownership has been violated, as the military and police officers have illegally confiscated land from people. According to a United Nations report, 'Land disputes are pervasive in Cambodian society. In particular, land-grabbing and illegal evictions have become major problems'. The report attributed this problem to the absence of a proper system for registration of land titles and to 'corruption, impunity and intimidation on the part of influential and powerful people'.[71] In 2002, land-grabbing cases involved more than 8,000 families or 43,000 people. In most cases, military and local officials were implicated. Few independent trade unions existed. With limited resources, they remained small and politically influential. Factory workers were allowed to stage strikes and hold demonstrations to protest low wages, forced overtime work, poor working conditions and dismissal from work because of their pro-union activities. But there were often serious consequences for them.

The judiciary remains in shambles. The courts remain subservient to political leaders' personal security interests. Before the 1993 election, some of the hundreds killed were non-CPP victims of extra-judicial executions. In the months leading up to the election, human-rights violations included the senseless slaughter of ethnic Vietnamese, abuse of prisoners and incidents of politically motivated murder.[72] Although the number of extra-judicial execu-

71 United Nations, 'Situation of human rights in Cambodia', United Nations Report (UN Doc. A/56/209, 26 July 2001), p. 8.

72 Amnesty International, 'Cambodia', *Amnesty International Report 1994* (London: Amnesty International Publications, 1994), p.86; for more on human rights in Cambodia before and after the 1993 election, see Human Rights Watch, *Human Rights Before and After the Elections* (New York: Human Rights Watch, May 1993) and Human Rights Watch, *An Exchange on Human Rights and Peace-keeping in Cambodia* (New York: Human Rights Watch, September 1993).

tions had decreased to only two in 1995,[73] the human rights situation worsened in 1996,[74] and deteriorated further in 1997, when four people died as a result of torture and at least 27 people, including six children, were extra-judicially executed.[75] During and after the incident in July 1997, scores of royalists were extra-judicially executed, while hundreds of others were detained without charge or trial.[76]

Meanwhile, criminal justice against Khmer Rouge leaders remains as elusive as ever. More than 20 years after the collapse of the Khmer Rouge regime, not a single one of its top leaders had been brought to trial for the atrocities committed in the 1975-1978 period. Several principal Khmer Rouge figures still lived freely in Pailin. Only two of them, Ta Mok and Duch, are in the government's custody, still awaiting trial.

One particular event that drew international attention was the order by Hun Sen on 3 December 1999 for the re-arrest of people who had been released from prison by the Cambodian courts. But by the end of 2003, very few of those who had committed crimes against members of the opposition had been brought to justice. Prisoners were often put in overcrowded cells and given inadequate food with no little or no nutrition. According to the UN Special Representative, 'overcrowding is terrible—people are like sardines, and there are prisons where they can't lie at the same time, so they do it in turns. While some sleep, others have to stand up, it's terrible'. He also remarked that, 'when you see it in a movie you will say it's grossly exaggerated, but it's not, it's a very harsh reality'.[77]

All these negative indicators suggest that the country's electoral regime lacks democratic quality. The executive branch of government remains unchecked and continues to act almost as it pleases without having to worry much about future elections. The CPP appears to have consolidated its grip

73 For details on the human rights situation in Cambodia in 1994, see Human Rights Watch, *Cambodia at War* (New York: Human Rights Watch, March 1995).

74 For more details, see Human Rights Watch, *Deterioration of Human Rights in Cambodia* (New York: Human Rights Watch, December 1996).

75 Amnesty International, 'Cambodia', *Amnesty International Report 1997* (London: Amnesty International Publications, 1997), p. 106.

76 Amnesty International, 'Cambodia', *Amnesty International Report 1998* (London: Amnesty International Publications, 1998), p. 119; for more details, see United Nations, 'Report of the Secretary-General on the Situation of Human Rights in Cambodia' (UN Doc.A/52, 26 September 1997).

77 Cited in *Phnom Penh Post*, 22 November-5 December 2002, p. 6.

on the country and is unlikely to loosen it to the extent that the rule of law can prevail and ensure truly free and fair elections.

The trend toward elective dictatorship is correlated with political stability. Since 1998, after the Khmer Rouge movement had disintegrated and been incorporated into the national armed forces, the country has been at peace. The faction's threat to the Hun Sen regime has ended, and its aging leaders have now become the target of criminal justice.

Stability can also be measured in terms of government efforts to destroy weapons, after the comprehensive weapons destruction programme was launched in 2001, with the help of the European Union. By early July 2001, Cambodia had destroyed more than 6,500 small arms as part of a worldwide campaign to eliminate illicit light weapons. According to a report in December 2002, Cambodia had destroyed 61,806 weapons.[78] By mid-July 2004, it was estimated that 131,000 weapons had been destroyed.[79]

Coup attempts and incidence of violence diminished and became less effective. There were several coup attempts during the 1990s, but only one was successful, when Hun Sen ousted his coalition partner First Prime Minister Ranariddh in July 1997. Subsequent coup attempts failed. On 24 November 2000, a group of so-called Cambodian Freedom Fighters (CFF) staged a coup in an armed attack on government buildings in Phnom Penh, leaving eight people dead and 14 injured, but the coup attempt failed.

Political stability remains precarious, however. During the showdown between Hun Sen and Chea Sim in July 2004, which led to the forced exile of the latter, Cambodia was almost brought to the brink of violent conflict. It began when the police forces of General Hok Lundy (Hun Sen's staunchest ally) surrounded Chea Sim's house on 13 July, allegedly under the order of Hun Sen. Army Head of Staff Ker Kim Yan, loyal to Chea Sim, then ordered troops under his command to clear the area surrounding Chea Sim's house in an attempt to free the CPP chief. Hun Sen reportedly threatened to kill Chea Sim if Ker Kim Yan attempted to crack down on the police.[80] Chea Sim returned to Cambodia after a nine-day 'exile' in Thailand, but the rift between the CPP leaders remained. Factional politics within the party remained seri-

78 IANSA (International Action Network on Small Arms), *IANSA News*, December 2002, p. 10.

79 EU ASAC Press Release on Weapons Destruction in Cambodia, 6 July 2004, http://www.iansa.org/ action/euasac_cambodia2004.htm

80 Khmer Intelligence, 23 July 2004.

ous, but as long as the two factions can maintain a balance of power, tense stability is likely to persist.

Prospects for democratic consolidation

Contrary to some observers of Cambodian politics who are optimistic about 'democratic consolidation',[81] I argue that democracy in this country is unlikely to become consolidated any time soon and that political violence will continue, especially when the CPP leadership believes that it will end up losing in future electoral competition.

Several indicators help support my contention. Opposition to the CPP's grip on power has weakened, and this provides a great temptation for Hun Sen to further consolidate power by seeking to eliminate any opponents unwilling to submit themselves to his political whims. Prince Ranariddh is unlikely to replace him in the foreseeable future. The Prince has neither the military power nor the political will to challenge Hun Sen head on, as he did during the fighting in July 1997. The Prince may survive as a national political figure, as long as he agrees to play second fiddle to Hun Sen. The main opposition party, the Sam Rainsy Party, remains politically weak, incapable of challenging the CPP outside the electoral arena, and will not win enough seats to form a government any time soon.

Moreover, Cambodian democracy is unlikely to mature or consolidate as long as socio-economic conditions remain so poor. One of the challenges facing Cambodia's new democracy today is the dire consequence of economic underdevelopment. Over the past decade, economic growth has been evident, but it has proved insufficient to bring the economy up to a healthy level. I do not argue that economic development alone is a sufficient condition for democratic development. Singapore is second only to Japan, when measured in terms of economic development, yet this city-state is in no way a liberal democracy.[82] Without economic development, however, the process of democratization may not reach maturity. According to Adam Przeworski and his associates, '[poor] democracies, particularly those with annual per capita income of less than US$1,000, are extremely fragile' and 'can be expected to last an average of about 8.5 years'. Democracies with an annual per capita income of above US$6,000 'are impregnable and can be expected to live forever'.[83] Based on the Japanese experience of democratic and economic development, equitable economic development is likely to stabilize democracy if it narrows income gaps, gives citizens equal access to public goods and accelerates social mobilization.[84] Cambodia remains one of the poorest countries in the world. A small number of wealthy individuals live among a large number of very poor individuals. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)'s Human Development Report in 2002, Cambodia ranked 130 out of 173 countries. The per capita income is still less than US$300 and the gap between rich and poor continues to widen. About 36 per cent of the population live below the national poverty line.[85] There is no relief in sight. In fact, recent negative trends are worrisome. According to a recent report by the World Bank, economic growth in 2005 was estimated to be as low as 1.9 per cent, compared to 4.3 per cent in 2004. Foreign investment declined noticeably from US$220 million in 1998 to only $50 million in 2002, despite greater political stability.[86] If Przeworski and his associates are correct, Cambodian democracy may not last.

In short, the best one can expect from Cambodia is a type of elective dictatorship, where the CPP exercises power as it pleases or stable illiberal democracy, where Hun Sen effectively exercises effective power over the electoral environment. Unfortunately, the problem with the prime minister is that he is not as effective as some believe. He has failed to combat the evil of corruption that has ruined the economy, but there are no guarantees that he would always succeed in monopolizing power. He and his loyalists have been accused of widespread corruption and of poor performance in meeting social, economic and political needs. Future attempts by his party to weaken or eliminate its opponents by force or coercion may still result in political violence, especially when the party's perceived vulnerability grows as it seeks to maintain its power at all costs amid new or growing challenges. If

81 Robert B. Albritton, 'Cambodia in 2003: On the Road to Democratic Consolidation', *Asian Survey* xliv(1) (2004): 102-109.

82 Lam Peng Er, 'Singapore: Rich State, Illiberal Regime', in *Driven By Growth: Political Change in the Asia-Pacific Region*, ed. James W. Morley (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1999).

83 Adam Przeworski *et al.*, 'What Makes Democracies Endure?', *Journal of Democracy* (January 1996), p. 41.

84 Ikuo Kabashima and T. MacDougall, 'Japan: Democracy with Growth and Equity', in *Driven By Growth: Political Change in the Asia-Pacific Region*, ed. by James W. Morley (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1999).

85 Population below income poverty line less than US$1 a day and US$2 a day is unavailable. See UNDP, *Human Development Report 2002*, p. 158.

86 Cited in *Phnom Penh Post*, 13-26 August 2004, pp. 1-2.

Lord Action is still correct in saying that 'Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely', there is more reason to worry about unrestrained leaders' ability to act as they please.

Conclusion and prospects

This study shows that political violence in Cambodia has persisted, but has varied from regime to regime, and contends that levels of political violence are also correlated with regime types. Neither culture nor power seem to have much explanatory sway. Culture helps us understand the persistence of violence, but if treated as a constant, it hardly sheds light on large-scale atrocities and fluctuations of violence. Ideology is more powerful as an explanatory variable. The Khmer Rouge regime was the most violently repressive when compared with the other regimes since Cambodian independence from France in 1954. If the lust for power is inherent in human nature as classical political realism suggests, then all of us should behave the same.[87] But Cambodian leaders' personal backgrounds suggest that, before their ascendancy to power, they seemed less prone to violence. The French 'did not see [Sihanouk] as a likely trouble-maker'.[88] Lon Nol was a 'calm man' and practiced Buddhism.[89] Chandler indicates that Pol Pot was not a monster before he engaged in political activity.[90] By using such variables as aggressive ultra-nationalism, xenophobia and power, scholars only describe the obvious. The 'lust of power' argument explains little why political violence has declined since the early 1990s. This does not suggest that power matters little, for power-holders can be assumed to be primarily interested in maintaining or enhancing their personal and regime security and work to *pre-empt* perceived opposition challenges. Violence is their preferred option if it is the only option available to them. An excellent study on the 'the political economy of death squads' shows that 'repressive violence' is not 'largely

87 Hans Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (Boston: McGraw Hill, 1993).

88 Milton Osborne, 'King-making in Cambodia: From Sisowath to Sihanouk', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 4 (1973), p. 178.

89 Justin Corfield, *Khmers Stand Up!* (Clayton: Center of Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University, 1994), pp. 1-2, 41-42.

90 Chandler, 1992, pp. 4-5.

reactive in character', but is rather 'proactive or pre-emptive'.[91] Escalating violence or repression is perpetuated, largely because of the state's structural weaknesses, which 'constrain' its 'ability ... to pursue accommodative alternatives to the escalation of repression'.[92]

There tends to be a clear correlation between levels of regime insecurity and vulnerability and degrees of political violence, as these variables are 'measurable'. The Cambodia case study validates the proposition that security is the primary motive for political violence, which tends to break out when armed political élites perceive their insecurity to be growing. Their pre-emptive pursuit of personal security can be empirically validated: the CPP under the leadership of Hun Sen has been responsible for most of the political violence since the early 1990s, as he has sought to maximize or maintain his political power. Behind this quest for power, however, has been the need to ensure that he would not be at the mercy of his enemies. Power-holders' pre-emptive attempts to repress opposition challenges can be explained by socio-economic problems as well as past experiences. Perception of threat may result from distrust, past experience, contingency planning, institutions for coping with threat and anxiety.[93] Perception of threat may also result from international isolation.[94]

91 David Mason and Dale T. Krane, 'The Political Economy of Death Squads: Toward a Theory of the Impact of State-Sanctioned Terror', *International Studies Quarterly*, 33(2) (1989), p. 177.

92 Mason and Krane, 1989, p. 182.

93 Dean Pruit, 'Definition of the Situation as a Determinant of International Action', in *International Behavior: A Socio-Psychological Analysis*, ed. by Herbert C. Kelman (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965). Distrust is viewed as an attitude 'in which another nation is seen as basically hostile to the interests of one's own nation' (p. 401); on anxiety, he claims that 'when people are anxious, they cast about for some concrete object to fear; they become predisposed to perceive threat' (p. 402). Past experience plays an important role in shaping threat perception. Another interesting study of perception and misperception in international relations can be found in Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), and *Logic of Images in International Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989).

94 Thomas Robinson and Bruce London found that dependency indirectly affects political violence through income inequality, but that the direct effect found in other research is not robust. Thomas Robinson and Bruce London, 'Dependency, Inequality, and Political Violence: A Cross-national Analysis', *Journal of Political and Military Sociology*, 19(1) (1991): 119-156. Some studies suggest that internal war is not affected by foreign investment. John M. Rothgeb, 'The Effects of Foreign Investment upon Political Protest

Cambodian experience further rejects the proposition that the most repressive regimes experience the lowest level of political violence, but validates the proposition that semi-democratic or illiberal democratic systems tend to be more stable and less prone to political violence (as the cases of Malaysia and Singapore demonstrate). Furthermore, Cambodia shows a temporary relationship between decline in political violence and elective dictatorship or illiberal democracy in the context of parliamentary systems,[95] which tend to allow room for a degree of political compromise through power-sharing among political parties, thus not threatening the survival of incumbent power-holders in the ruling party to the extent that they would be removed from power and subject to the perennial politics of retribution, personal, judicial or otherwise. Political leaders thus appear to be concerned less about relative power (sharing power with others as long as they remain on top in the power structure), but more about losing power completely.

By no means do I suggest that Cambodia's current political system is morally acceptable. As noted, violations of human rights, especially political rights and civil liberties, remain a threat to its citizens. The political system remains unstable and the electoral democracy that the country has now achieved may fall victim to the authoritarian politics dominated by Hun Sen. What Cambodia needs most is not to remove the CPP from power completely, for doing so would increase its vulnerability and provoke violence-prone behaviour. The country needs political and social institutions that do not pose a direct threat to the CPP's power, but would weaken it in the long run.

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95 Juan J. Linz, 'The Perils of Presidentialism', in *The Global Resurgence of Democracy*, ed. by Larry Diamond and Marc F. Plattner (Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); Juan J. Linz, 'The Virtues of Parliamentarianism', in *The Global Resurgence of Democracy*, ed. by Larry Diamond and Marc F. Plattner (Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

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