

CAMBODIA: GETTING AWAY WITH AUTHORITARIANISM?

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What if a country holds an election but it proves not to matter? Cambodians voted nationwide in July 2003, only to see their polity's three main political parties take almost a year to form a new administration. The long-ruling Cambodian People's Party (CPP) of Prime Minister Hun Sen won 47.4 percent of the popular vote but gained 59.3 percent of the seats in the National Assembly thanks to Cambodia's unusual "highest-average" system of proportional voting, which favors large parties.¹ The CPP's two main rivals, the nominally royalist formation known by its French acronym of FUNCINPEC and the populist opposition Sam Rainsy Party (or SRP, named for its founder and leading personality) each won around about a fifth of the total vote and a similar share of seats in the 123-member National Assembly (the actual seat totals were 73 for the CPP, 26 for FUNCINPEC, and 24 for the SRP).

Since Cambodia's 1993 constitution stipulates that a two-thirds parliamentary majority is needed to form a government, the parties had to bargain in the election's wake. Bargain they did, for 11 long months. All during this time Cambodia had no properly constituted government, but little changed. Power remained firmly in the hands of the CPP, which has ruled since the 1980s, initially under Vietnamese tutelage. It has such a tight grip that elections have become little more than a sideshow, helping to bolster the electoral-authoritarian regime that Hun Sen has built.

In 1993, general elections overseen by the United Nations Transitional Authority for Cambodia (UNTAC) helped to create the conditions for an end to the violence that had killed millions over the preceding

decades. A coalition government brought together most leading figures, and it seemed as if the basis for lasting peace and political pluralism was in place. More than a decade later, the picture looks much grimmer. Hun Sen's CPP—which lost the 1993 elections and was supposedly the junior partner in the government that followed—has completely eclipsed FUNCINPEC, created by King Norodom Sihanouk and led by his son Prince Ranariddh. The CPP is a tightly organized party with formidable grassroots networks and a primary appeal to the rural masses. While Hun Sen plainly dominates the CPP, an important faction is loyal to nominal party leader Chea Sim. FUNCINPEC has a more ad hoc structure, and has long been forced to play a subordinate role to the CPP. FUNCINPEC's supporters include rural dwellers and much of the educated urban elite. Both parties are now effectively postideological; the pursuit of wealth and power forms the main concern of each. Rainsy is the only significant opposition figure and as such has faced sustained harassment from both the CPP and FUNCINPEC. Where is Cambodia heading?

The early 1990s saw UNTAC winning general plaudits for its role in the 1993 Cambodian election and its aftermath. Very few people lost their lives, which was no small feat given Cambodia's bloody recent history. FUNCINPEC's victory in the polling was a surprise. The CPP, which had been running Cambodia for 14 years, was generally considered unbeatable because of its tight grip on village-level political structures. Although the CPP objected at first, all sides eventually accepted the results and a new government formed fairly quickly. If we believe that the smoother the transition, the better the chances for change in the direction of liberal democracy, then Cambodia's post-1993 transition seemed a promising example.

But did UNTAC preside over an actual transition? Despite his notionally subordinate status as second prime minister after 1993, Hun Sen kept de facto control over Cambodia. Many observers focused on the residual presence of cadres from the mass-murdering Khmer Rouge regime of 1975 to 1979, and failed to see that the real struggle lay between the CPP and its electoral rivals.² The UNTAC interlude of 1992 and 1993 did bolster the peace process, but politically it was only a passing outside intervention that left the CPP's grip on power unchanged. The supposed smoothness of the transition was undermined by the CPP's belligerent demands for equal treatment, illustrated by its insistence on the appointment of two "prime" ministers.

The successes of the 1993 election—notably the use of a secret ballot—were more technical than substantive, for FUNCINPEC's victory led to no real transfer of power. This victory's hollowness became clearer following Hun Sen's 1997 internal coup against Ranariddh and FUNCINPEC, the problematic 1998 election, and the troubling 2003 election and its technically cabinetless aftermath. What happened un-

der UNTAC in 1993 was the beginning of a pattern in which Hun Sen used the outward show of electioneering to legitimize the status quo rather than let power change hands. At best, election results had a marginal impact on the relative clout of the CPP's rivals for power.

According to Trevor Findlay, UNTAC correctly grasped that ordinary Cambodians longed for peace and could handle secret ballots, appreciated that democratic mechanisms could work in Cambodia, and backed Sihanouk as “the one Cambodian who could help deliver a national renaissance and unity.”³ The last of these claims is by far the most problematic. Sihanouk played a major role in brokering the ambiguous deal that returned power to the CPP and Hun Sen after the elections. In short, FUNCINPEC won the elections, and Sihanouk handed power to the CPP. His actions reflected the political realities of the day: Removing the CPP from power was beyond the reach of either Hun Sen's domestic rivals or UNTAC—despite the debate that raged for a time within the international community about the acceptability of the Sihanouk-brokered deal.

The rest is history. Elections in Hun Sen's Cambodia have become an exercise in political theater that the CPP uses to legitimize its power. As Pierre Lizée writes of the 1998 elections, they “represented not so much a first step in an overdue process of democratization of the political environment in Cambodia, but rather a movement full circle to precisely the situation of autocracy which these elections were supposed to remedy.”⁴

Caroline Hughes cites interviews with voters in support of her argument that the way in which the CPP retained power despite losing the 1993 election undermined their faith in the democratic process. The CPP's improved showing in the 1998 balloting reflected highly effective techniques of “surveillance” and other methods that the ruling party used to intimidate rural voters despite the notional protection afforded them by the secret ballot. Twenty-two political murders in the two months prior to the election heightened the sense of fear. Neither the 1998 or 2003 elections were really about determining who held power in Cambodia.

The Dominance of Hun Sen

In Phnom Penh, where voters have generally gone against the CPP, that party's supporters are thin on the ground. Hun Sen's base is in the provinces, where the CPP uses its control of patronage and government resources (mainly derived from foreign aid) to keep power. And despite his apparently rock-solid position, Hun Sen shows signs of worry. He rarely leaves the country, and then only to go to nearby lands. During his absences, more police officers and soldiers can be seen on the streets of the capital. He travels by helicopter between his house in central

Phnom Penh and his main home on the city's outskirts. His thousand-man bodyguard force is equipped with tanks and other sophisticated weaponry.

Hun Sen has not always been popular with the international community, and has often been portrayed in the United States as a Vietnamese puppet and an authoritarian with communist leanings. Yet following the 1979 Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia, he played an important supporting role in replacing the disastrous Khmer Rouge regime with one dedicated to putting Cambodia back on the map. For all Sihanouk's charm and Ranarridh's bluster, the royalists have never mustered a serious political challenge to the CPP. All too many FUNCINPEC leaders have been self-serving, inept, and out of touch with the concerns of ordinary Cambodians, especially in the provinces. In part by coopting FUNCINPEC and persistently steering it into close identification with the government, Hun Sen has sapped the royalists' credibility and defined the CPP as the only serious political choice for Cambodia. Indeed, there has even been talk that the two parties might one day merge.

Pragmatic commentators have called upon the West to work with Hun Sen, rather than to wish him gone. While the United States gives no aid to the Cambodian government—instead channeling support through NGOs—other donors pledged more than US\$500 million in 2004. There is a good case for arguing that in the 1980s and early 1990s, the CPP provided more decent and effective governance than was generally realized. Supporters of Hun Sen see him as caught in a spiral of bureaucratic corruption and ineptitude, struggling manfully to get things done, but lacking the state capacity to achieve his goals. Despite his lack of formal education, he boasts a formidable intuitive grasp of political issues. But for his critics, Hun Sen remains part of the problem rather than part of the solution. While he excels at gaining and securing power, he seemingly cannot or will not use it in ways that will benefit the Cambodian people. Probably the most convincing reading argues that Hun Sen set out as an impressive and dedicated leader, but has gradually become corrupted by power and is losing touch with his grassroots support.

The country's most pressing problems are socioeconomic. The vast bulk of the populace remains desperately poor. The average civil servant lives on about \$28 per month. During the UNTAC years and beyond, a select few Cambodians got rich quickly, thanks in no small part to the practice of charging international organizations and foreign residents enormously inflated prices. The aid industry that followed UNTAC's departure has consolidated Cambodia's curious dual economy, recruiting the best and the brightest young Cambodians and thereby denuding both the public and private sectors of talented people. More than a decade after UNTAC, Cambodia remains heavily aid-dependent. There

has been little international investment except in the garment-production and hotel sectors, and at least five garment factories have closed since Cambodia's World Trade Organization accession in January 2005. Phnom Penh is the center of an aid-funded subeconomy that hinges on development agencies and projects, but to travel a short distance outside the capital is to find a land where electric power and clean running water remain sadly rare.

In the provinces, well-connected elites, often with military or police ties, have seized huge swaths of land.⁵ Deforestation is rife, and plans are afoot for large and environmentally disastrous eucalyptus plantations. The bloated Royal Cambodian Armed Forces (RCAF) consume around a quarter of all government revenues and control more than 700,000 hectares of land in "Military Development Zones," yet do little to protect national security. The need for drastic reform of the RCAF is urgent. The World Bank had tasked the NGO Global Witness to monitor the condition of Cambodia's forests, until the Bank egregiously surrendered to the Hun Sen regime's complaints and replaced Global Witness with the more a more pliable Swiss concern, the Société Générale de Surveillance (SGS).⁶

Corruption has become a central concern for donors and Cambodians alike. The need for under-the-table payments is pervasive. One survey suggests that public-school students in urban areas are paying an average of \$44 per year in bribes to their teachers.⁷ Doctors and nurses routinely expect bribes for providing prompt and effective medical care. To address donor concerns about corruption, Hun Sen has recently adopted what he terms an "iron fist" approach, backed up by at least one high-profile firing and a March 2005 public conference held at a Phnom Penh hotel. Rhetoric aside, however, the impression remains widespread that members of Hun Sen's own inner circle are corrupt, in ways that set a bad example for lower-ranking officials.

Top positions in institutions ranging from the military to Buddhist monasteries are openly bought and sold. The heads of the national police, for instance, have never attended a police academy. Promotions to senior police posts typically cost \$500 to \$1,000 in bribes. A national survey showed that people view the Ministry of Justice as the most corrupt government agency. Ministers and other senior officials are literally selling their offices: In a troubling sign of the slide toward kleptocracy, public buildings including the Royal University of Fine Arts and certain cabinet ministries in Phnom Penh have been "swapped" for new locations provided by private speculators. Even the Choeng Ek "killing fields" memorial site was recently handed over to a mysterious Japanese company on a thirty-year lease.

Despite the government's feeble response to donors' demands for increased transparency and serious moves to combat corruption, a December 2004 Consultative Group Meeting of international donors

resulted in \$504 million worth of new pledges—slightly more than the government had requested. For all the talk of donor coordination, international and national development agencies are competing against one another on the ground to carve out niche sectors for their own projects and programs. The government skilfully exploits rivalries among donors in order to play one off against another.

Hun Sen's main rival for popular support from 1979 to 2004 was Sihanouk, who has been not only king but also prime minister and (under the Khmer Rouge) "head of state." A deal made as UNTAC was winding down brought him back to the throne. While the constitution declares that the king reigns but does not rule, Sihanouk has long been a major political player and an alternative source of legitimacy. Often criticized as inconsistent and "mercurial," Sihanouk has since 1993 frequently sided against FUNCINPEC, the party that he founded, and has supported Hun Sen and the CPP instead. Nevertheless, he has been able to challenge Hun Sen's authority by speaking out on salient issues, often in recent years via his oft-visited Web site.⁸

The prime minister's personality cult—down to the Hun Sen watches on sale at Phnom Penh's central market—is meant to displace the monarchy as the prime source of legitimacy. Milton Osborne argues that Hun Sen has gradually developed a "modified political persona," offering a less aggressive face to the outside world and cultivating his own image within Cambodia by building clinics and schools, much as Sihanouk did in the 1950s and 1960s.⁹ Hun Sen is always officially known as *samdech*, or prince, a title that he effectively granted to himself. Regally, Hun Sen and his wife provide special funds to families with triplets. Some Cambodians believe that their country has an unusual number of triplets because the wandering souls of Khmer Rouge victims are being reborn after entering the wombs of women already pregnant.

Dogged by illness, exasperated by the haggling after the 2003 election, and perhaps fearing that Hun Sen would abolish the monarchy if a royal death left the throne vacant, the 81-year-old Sihanouk abdicated in favor of his 51-year-old son Sihamoni (Ranariddh's decade-younger half-brother) in late 2004.¹⁰ By abdicating, Sihanouk ensured that the more headstrong Prince Ranariddh, whom he distrusts, did not succeed him. Sihamoni, a former dancer who has lived abroad for much his life, appeared unlikely to challenge Hun Sen. Nevertheless, he soon began to receive numerous petitions from subjects anxious for justice, including many who accused the government of trampling on their rights. On the day of his coronation, he pledged to tour the country in order to meet people and hear their concerns; his travels since then have proved extremely popular. Sihanouk himself has remained a powerful presence still able to press Hun Sen, who in June 2005 made televised remarks denouncing "sycophants" around the throne whom he accused of plot-

ting to set up a provisional government.¹¹ The outburst illustrated the prime minister's continuing paranoia about the monarchy's potency as a political symbol and rival source of legitimacy.

A Tribunal on the Khmer Rouge

For many outside Cambodia, the country remains synonymous with the Khmer Rouge and the "killing fields" of the late 1970s. Following the 1979 Vietnamese invasion, a tribunal that included foreign judges—and which has since been heavily criticized—tried in absentia and sentenced to death Khmer Rouge leaders Pol Pot and Ieng Sary. Neither sentence was ever carried out. Since then there have been numerous calls for a new trial of Khmer Rouge leaders, with much discussion of trying larger numbers of defendants and striking a more acceptable balance between the respective roles of local and foreign judges.

There is general agreement among prominent commentators and scholars working on Cambodia that the culture of legal impunity which today pervades Cambodian public life is in some way related to the failure to bring Khmer Rouge leaders to justice. A small group of men, in other words, have been "getting away with genocide."¹² Supporters of a new tribunal cite opinion polls suggesting that a trial would have wide public backing. A 2004 survey conducted across several provinces by the Khmer Institute for Democracy showed that 96.8 per cent of respondents wanted to see such a trial. At the same time, more than two-fifths (44.1 percent) said that no trial at all would be better than a substandard trial. Many respondents, especially those with more schooling, were skeptical that any trial would be fair, and seemed more interested in the tribunal as a means of unearthing what happened under the Khmer Rouge than as a means for punishing its leaders. Complicating factors include the possibility that a more widely defined judicial process could indict Hun Sen himself, or other leading CPP figures who were previously Khmer Rouge cadres.

A second issue concerns the role of Sihanouk, who served as head of state for the Khmer Rouge and had a highly ambiguous relationship with the regime. Could he also face trial? Since putting Hun Sen or Sihanouk on trial would be politically impossible, the UN has been obliged to agree upon a formula that would focus the tribunal on a small group of leaders. One scholar has wondered if such a narrowly focused trial may wind up serving as *de facto* exoneration for Hun Sen and as such boost the legitimacy of his government.¹³

The origins of the CPP and the Hun Sen government lie in Vietnam's invasion and toppling of the Khmer Rouge in 1979. Therefore, some observers reason, Hun Sen has an interest in whatever will remind people of the Khmer Rouge horrors that he and his party, whatever their flaws, brought to an end. The more people in Cambodia and abroad focus on

the murders and other acts of brutality that the Khmer Rouge committed a quarter-century ago, the notion runs, the less these citizens and observers will focus on the increasingly authoritarian nature of the Hun Sen regime itself. Cambodia still observes an official, Vietnam-established day of hatred against the Khmer Rouge. Hun Sen came to power saying, in effect, "Support me or the Khmer Rouge may come back." This mantra has had no credibility since the mid-1990s. Perhaps Hun Sen is hoping that a tribunal will flog some life back into it. Then too, holding a highly publicized international tribunal will bring a great influx of foreign funds and persons to give the flagging Cambodian economy a shot in the arm. The preliminary estimate for the official costs of the tribunal is \$60 million, with sizeable contingents of journalists, activists, and assorted hangers-on expected to arrive and spend still more.

Telling pollsters "yes" when they ask about the idea of a new tribunal is not the same as actively supporting such a trial. In fact, there has been no strong homegrown movement for fresh proceedings, whether on the part of the government or of Cambodian society at large. The main drivers behind the idea have included the Clinton administration and other Western governments, plus a group of Cambodian and international human rights activists. The tribunal also offers the chance for professional Cambodia-watchers to become involved in making history: Some will probably work for the tribunal or write books about it. In some important respects, the tribunal will be UNTAC revisited, a chance for well-intentioned outsiders to play a crucial role. In the process, it will allow those commentators who once expressed sympathy for the Khmer Rouge—including some prominent Cambodia specialists—to atone for their past errors. It will also permit those academics and commentators who have long supported Hun Sen to feel that their faith in the CPP has not been completely betrayed.

Who would benefit from the tribunal? The hope is that, like the 1993 election, this massive international intervention in Cambodian public life will stimulate a reaction from the public, promoting deeper political participation and creating the conditions for national reconciliation. There is some evidence to support this hope: A remarkable 64.3 per cent of those interviewed in the 2004 survey said that they would like to attend the trial in person. If such a development occurs, the effort and expense of the tribunal would be well worth it. Some observers go further and speculate that even a half-baked tribunal could yield advantages if it weakens Hun Sen's grip on power. Others, however, worry that a bungled judicial process will prove unsettling and divisive: There is a real danger that the unearthing of long-buried anxieties could prove highly disturbing to ordinary Cambodians, and achieve the opposite of reconciliation. In view of Cambodia's recent history of political violence, many observers blanch at the prospect of a popular confrontation

with authority serious enough to threaten the CPP's rule. Given what has followed UNTAC, one must be skeptical that an intervention from outside, even if well crafted, will trigger for Cambodia a "Eureka!" moment of transformative popular awakening, democratic enlightenment, or national reconciliation.

Given Cambodia's recent history of bloodthirsty ideological dictatorship and civil war, the bar for what constitutes improvement is extremely low. Hun Sen and his cohorts "get away with" authoritarianism because strongman rule is a lesser evil than mass murder.

What sort of a political order does Cambodia now have? Is it an electoral but illiberal democracy, holding relatively fair votes but in other respects rather authoritarian? Could one call it an "electoral authoritarian regime with pseudodemocratic elements"? The party system is becoming ever more hegemonic and is causing Cambodia to resemble PRI-era Mexico, with "a relatively institutionalized ruling party monopoliz[ing] the political arena, [and] using coercion, patronage, media control, and other means to deny formally legal opposition parties any real chance of competing for power."¹⁴ In Cambodia today, one sees ruling-party hegemony

with a twist, as the party that had been the CPP's most active opponent and rival, FUNCINPEC, is now a loyal coalition partner buttressing and legitimizing CPP dominance.

To support his thesis that the CPP is now indisputably hegemonic, Larry Diamond cites its overwhelming victory (70 percent of the vote, 99 percent of the seats) in the 2002 commune-council elections. The 2003 general elections would seem to tell against this analysis, however, since FUNCINPEC and the SRP together picked up 43 percent of the vote nationwide (with smaller parties winning the remaining 10 percent). The SRP showed itself to be especially popular in Phnom Penh. So whatever the CPP's degree of hegemony on the plane of local government, that party still found itself facing what should have been a power-sharing situation at the national level.

And yet "what should have been" was not what actually came to pass. For in 2003 as before, the election result and the political outcome were two different things. In 1993, the election's winners remained subordinated to its losers. As the 1998 races loomed, the CPP preempted any possible competition by staging what amounted to a coup during the summer of 1997. Lines of authority were rearranged, certain opposition leaders found themselves driven into exile, and intimidation was widely deployed. In 2003, the election results simply went unimplemented for almost a year: From July 2003 to June 2004, Cambodia had no properly

constituted government, but continued to function pretty much exactly as before.

In the Cambodian case, we are not looking at a transition toward liberal democracy that has been stymied, derailed, or thrown into reverse, but rather at one that has never even left the station. The nonprogress of this nontransition has gone largely unnoticed by an international community eager to detect signs of improvement, and happy to view the holding of virtually any elections as a step forward. Given Cambodia's recent history of bloodthirsty ideological dictatorship and civil war, the bar for what constitutes improvement is extremely low. Hun Sen and his cohorts "get away with" authoritarianism because strongman rule is a lesser evil than mass murder.

Assessments of Cambodian elections often reveal a certain creeping relativism. Tin Maung Maung Tan reports that, despite widespread complaints from members of the public, most observers found the National Electoral Commission's preparations for the 2003 elections to be "acceptable." Trevor Findlay notes that the 1993 election was conducted in a "comparatively free, fair and democratic manner"—a formulation that raises the question, "'Free, fair, and democratic' as compared to what?"¹⁵ That same election clearly flunked a key test of democracy, for FUNCINPEC won the vote but the CPP continued to rule. In this fundamental sense, it was not a democratic election. Whatever transition the UN Transitional Authority may have overseen, it was not a transition to democracy.

While Cambodian elections are not such a sham that no one cares about them at all, their ineffectuality at breaking or even loosening the CPP's quarter-century-old grip on power means that they have not "taken on a life of their own," and may instead be perilously close to failing the Macbeth test: "only so much sound and fury, signifying nothing."¹⁶ Despite the good press that UNTAC still gets, Cambodia is another awkward case that raises troubling questions about how grounded in reality the transition paradigm truly is.

Perhaps stung because their party's seat share had dropped sharply from 43 to 24 percent owing to the public's tendency to identify them with the CPP, the leaders of FUNCINPEC in 2003 joined the SRP in a so-called Alliance of Democrats (AD). The AD proclaimed itself willing to join a grand national-unity coalition government with the CPP as senior partner so long as that party would eject Hun Sen and his key lieutenant Sok An from their ministerial posts. Not surprisingly, Hun Sen declined to step down, and talks over how to form a government dragged on.

The AD hoped to bring about substantive reform of the Cambodian state, in return for supporting a modernized government of national unity resembling the political order that Cambodia had before 1970.¹⁷ In addition to the resignations of Hun Sen and Sok An, the AD also

called for the passage of an anticorruption law and backed the idea of requiring a parliamentary confidence vote or else a new general election in the event of any cabinet reshuffling—this last being a measure that would give the AD more opportunities to split the CPP and peel support away from Hun Sen and his circle.

Although the constitution requires that the National Assembly should convene within sixty days after the election, this provision was no match for Hun Sen's determination to see his rivals marginalized. The new Assembly did not meet until December 2003, and then sat for only twenty minutes. With the AD counting for about 40 percent of the seats and thus denying the CPP its coveted two-thirds majority, the CPP leadership focused on FUNCINPEC as the more pliable of the two AD partners. Many FUNCINPEC legislators had been bankrolled by wealthy businesspeople with close CPP ties.¹⁸ In part by leveraging these, Hun Sen persuaded Ranariddh in March 2004 to agree to a two-party governing coalition. Ranariddh did not bother to consult his party. The SRP talked up rumors that he had agreed to split commissions on government contracts 60-40 with Hun Sen, that Hun Sen had paid Ranariddh handsomely for his acquiescence, or that Hun Sen had given the prince an airplane and even a promise to support his claim to the royal succession. True or not, these claims were widely believed on the streets of Phnom Penh.

Parties Without Principles

The politicians from FUNCINPEC, who generally went along with Ranariddh even though not consulted beforehand, appear to have been rewarded by a doubling in the number of senior governmental posts. Steve Heder argues that FUNCINPEC is aping the CPP by abandoning its notional ideology (royalism in the one case, state socialism in the other) in order to satisfy private greed. To be sure of getting his way, Hun Sen made all the new arrangements the subject of a single up-or-down Assembly vote—a move of doubtful constitutional validity—and forced Senate President Chea Sim to leave the country so that he could not block the maneuver. Sihanouk too was frozen out, albeit by less drastic means. His frustration over the new government and the manner in which it was formed appears to have sparked his decision to abdicate later in 2004.

Soon after the creation of a joint CPP-FUNCINPEC government in July 2004, Hun Sen announced that this formation would serve Cambodia well for the next two to three decades. Stories began to appear suggesting that the two parties would merge before the 2008 elections. Any such merger would have the effect of creating a single hegemonic party, likely to dominate Cambodian politics for some time to come. Meanwhile, the SRP began to feel immense pressure; on 3 February

2004, Rainsy and two of his leading MPs lost their parliamentary immunity after an overwhelming vote in the National Assembly. They then faced immediate arrest on defamation charges, filed by National Assembly president Ranariddh over SRP claims that he had accepted a large bribe when joining forces with the CPP to form a new government. Rainsy fled the country, and Cambodia's only substantive opposition voice fell largely silent.

Far from taking on a life of their own, elections in Cambodia are becoming more and more lifeless. Each one is an occasion for the CPP to deploy tactics of denial and delay in order to keep its grip on power while popular confusion and disappointment mount. Such ballotings are neither "Eureka!" moments nor even moments that merely "signify nothing." On the contrary, by raising expectations that they will not come close to meeting, they are actively troubling to the Cambodian people.

Looking back, we may wonder if the 1993 elections were an example of what Francis Fukuyama terms "premature democratization."¹⁹ Did UNTAC put the cart before the horse by trying to install democracy in the absence of a sufficiently well-established state? Perhaps, but one might also say that UNTAC sought to plant democracy in a country where not only was the state weak, but the CPP regime was already all too strong. Moreover, UNTAC's paramount concern with ensuring that the Khmer Rouge could not return played into the CPP's hands. FUNCINPEC turned out to be a convenient mirage, a "noncommunist" voting option helpless to gain power even after an election win.

"Within the bureaucracy," relates Evan Gottesman, "civil servants continued to answer to CPP officials rather than to FUNCINPEC ministers. In the provinces, FUNCINPEC governors were equally powerless, as district and commune chiefs, police officers and clerks ignored their nominal bosses."²⁰ In a sense, democratization may have reached Cambodia too late: While the state was weak, the CPP regime was robust and deep-rooted. Gottesman describes Cambodian pluralism not as democracy, but as "a tenuous compact among competing patronage systems." Cambodia today is controlled by most of the same people who gained power in 1979.

The government's keen awareness of its continuing reliance on foreign aid is enough to keep open repression fairly rare. Yet abuses of power, land seizures, deforestation, environmental destruction, and exploitation of all kinds are common. Often the perpetrators are members of the police, military officers, or others well connected to the ruling elite. Cambodian civil society is vocal but relies heavily on foreign funding and expertise. Various NGOs campaign against injustices, receiving sympathetic coverage in local Western-language newspapers while having little real impact. There are several oppositional Khmer-language newspapers, full of partisan criticism of the CPP, but their

quality remains abysmal despite a massive international investment in journalism training.

Hun Sen is now under pressure from international donors to deliver the goods in areas such as poverty alleviation and good governance, yet the continuing willingness of the donor community to tolerate or even collude with the ineptitude and rampant corruption of the Cambodian government means that no progress is in sight. Touting his “iron-fist” approach to judicial reform, Hun Sen argued in March 2005 that protecting human rights must take second place to enforcing the law. He cited as an example the war on drugs launched by Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra in neighboring Thailand.

There can be no liberalization of Cambodian politics until the CPP's formidable network of power and patronage unravels, which is unlikely to happen while Hun Sen is still on the scene.

“Thaksin,” said Hun Sen, “did not use the court but [instead ordered] the police to shoot and kill almost five thousand criminals. But [he still] won the most votes in the election. But I will not do it like that. [I will] only have them arrested and prosecuted.”²¹ This disturbing statement suggests that donors’ demands for good governance and reduced corruption could backfire dangerously by giving Hun Sen more pretexts to extend and deepen his rule as he claims unparalleled powers to root out and punish abuses.

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The fall of Hun Sen would require fragmentation within the CPP elite, the backing of the palace, or both. The prospect of a Khmer Rouge trial is likely to offer Hun Sen a further opportunity for political grandstanding, diverting both domestic and international attention from his own misuses of power. Both UNTAC and the expected Khmer Rouge tribunal illustrate the ways in which substantial international interventions may be manipulated so that they do more to legitimize authoritarianism than to support democracy.

NOTES

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1. See Jeffrey Gallup, “Cambodia’s Electoral System: A Window of Opportunity for Reform” in Aurel Crossant, ed., *Electoral Politics in Southeast and East Asia* (Singapore: Friedrich Ebert Foundation, 2002), 36.

2. See Sorpong Peou, *Conflict Neutralization in the Cambodia War: From Battlefield to Ballot-Box* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1997), 76–77.

3. Trevor Findlay, *Cambodia: The Legacy and Lessons of UNTAC* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 160.

4. See Pierre P. Lizée, “Testing the Limits of Change: Cambodia’s Politics After the July Elections,” *Southeast Asian Affairs 1999* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1999), 79; and Caroline Hughes, “Surveillance and Resistance in the Cambodian Elections: The Prisoners’ Dilemma,” in the same volume, esp. 104–106.

5. Details of corruption surrounding Cambodia’s Aural Wildlife Sanctuary are catalogued in an impressive Global Witness report of November 2004, “Taking a Cut,” which may be accessed via www.globalwitness.org. The report names names, including those of prominent politicians and military figures.

6. For example, the SGS report for the third quarter of 2004 stated that illegal deforestation was continuing at minimal levels, but admitted that the SGS had no detailed information to support this claim because the Cambodian Environment Ministry had not been sending it any. *Koh Santepheap*, 8 December 2004, translated in *The Mirror*, Issue 398, 5–11 December 2004 (Phnom Penh: Open Forum). While Global Witness sent its own investigators to the forests, SGS appears to rely mainly on satellite photographs.

7. Christine J. Nissen, *Living Under the Rule of Corruption: An Analysis of Everyday Forms of Corrupt Practices in Cambodia* (Phnom Penh: Center for Social Development, 2005), 24, 26. For the Justice Ministry survey, see *Corruption and Cambodian Households: Household Survey of Perceptions, Attitudes and Impact of Everyday Forms of Corrupt Practices in Cambodia* (Phnom Penh: Center for Social Development, 2005), 115.

8. See www.sihanouk.info, which includes a large number of documents, mainly in French, often featuring the former king’s handwritten comments.

9. Milton Osborne, “Cambodia: Hun Sen Consolidates Power,” *Southeast Asian Affairs 2000* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2000), 103.

10. Kimina Lyall, “King’s Gambit an Old Move in Cambodia’s Chequered History,” *Weekend Australian* (Sydney), 9 October 2004.

11. “Cambodian Premier Speaks out Against ‘Sycophants,’ Threatens Arrest,” *BBC Monitoring International Reports*, Television Kampuchea, 15 June 2005. Hun Sen has been widely criticized for allegedly allowing Vietnam to encroach on “Khmer” territory, a popular opposition rallying cry that Sihanouk also has taken up from time to time.

12. Tom Fawthrop and Helen Jarvis, *Getting Away with Genocide? Elusive*

Justice and the Khmer Rouge Tribunal (London: Pluto, 2004). See also Stephen Heder, "Dealing with Crimes Against Humanity: Progress or Illusion?" *Southeast Asian Affairs 2001* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2001), 129–40; and Stephen Heder and Brian Tittmore, *Seven Candidates for the Prosecution: Accountability for the Crimes of the Khmer Rouge* (Phnom Penh: Documentation Center of Cambodia, 2004). Survey data come from the Khmer Institute for Democracy, "Survey on the Khmer Rouge Regime and the Khmer Rouge Tribunal," Phnom Penh, October 2004.

13. Stephen Heder, "Dealing with Crimes Against Humanity," 14. In a paper delivered at the German Historical Institute in Washington, D.C., on 29 March 2003, Heder argued again for a broader trial going well beyond top leaders. He comes under strong criticism for this position in Fawthrop and Jarvis, *Getting Away with Genocide?* 271–73.

14. See Larry Diamond, "Elections Without Democracy: Thinking About Hybrid Regimes," *Journal of Democracy* 13 (April 2002): 25.

15. Tin Maung Maung Tan, "Cambodia: Strongman, Terrible Man, Invisible Man, and the Politics of Power Sharing," *Southeast Asian Affairs 2004* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2004), 74; Findlay, *Cambodia*, 155.

16. Andreas Schedler, "Elections Without Democracy: The Menu of Manipulation," *Journal of Democracy* 13 (April 2002): 38–39 and 41. See also Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, "The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism," *Journal of Democracy* 13 (April 2002): 63.

17. Stephen Heder, "Hun Sen's Consolidation: Death or Beginning of Reform?" *Southeast Asian Affairs 2005* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2005), 115–17.

18. Stephen Heder, "Hun Sen's Consolidation," 117.

19. Francis Fukuyama, "Building Democracy After Conflict: 'Stateness' First," *Journal of Democracy* 16 (January 2005): 88.

20. Evan Gottesman, *Cambodia After the Khmer Rouge: Inside the Politics of Nation Building* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 352–53.

21. "Hun Sen Defends 'Iron Fist' Reform Approach," *Cambodia Daily* (Phnom Penh), 10 March 2005. Hun Sen's estimate of five thousand deaths in Thaksin's war on drugs is considerably higher than the figures reported by Thai government sources and by international commentators. Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have roundly condemned the methods used in the Thai war on drugs.