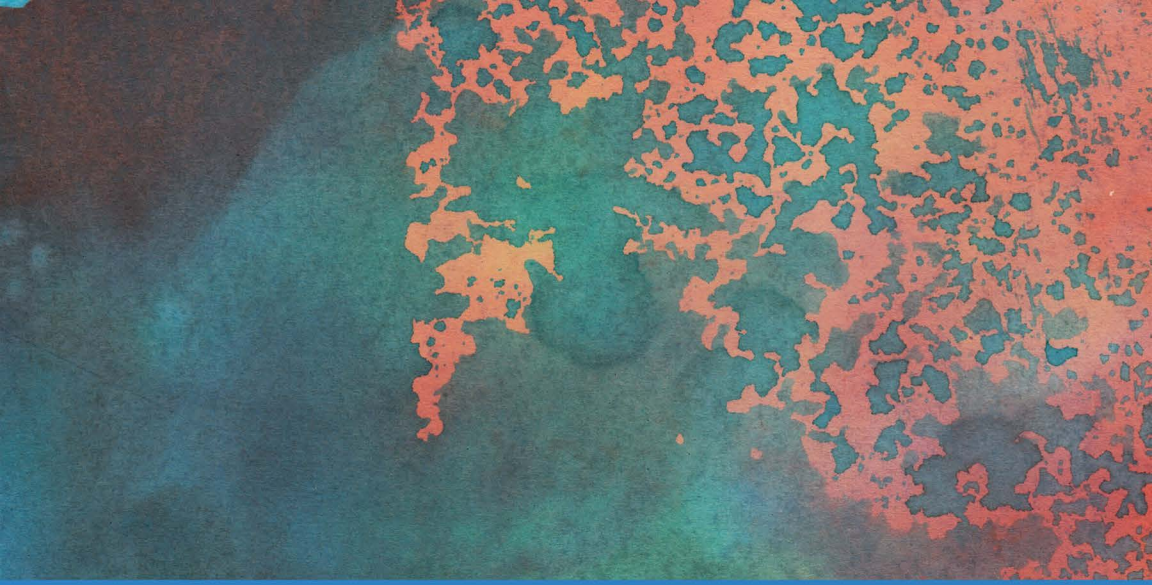

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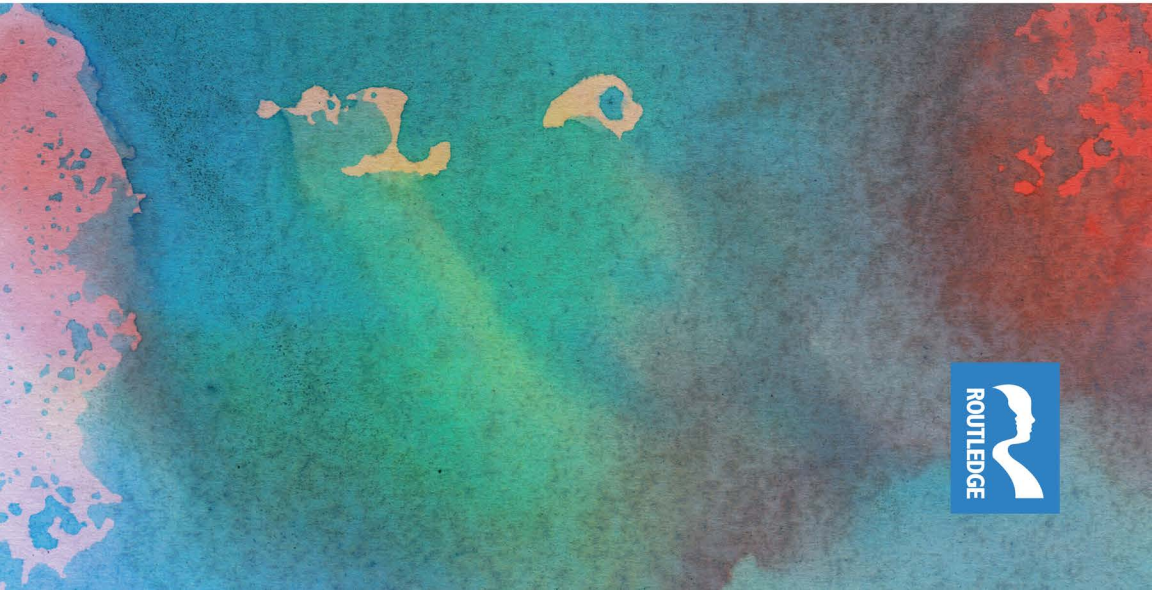
CAMBODIA'S CHINA STRATEGY

SECURITY DILEMMAS OF EMBRACING THE DRAGON

Chanborey Cheunboran



Cambodia's China Strategy

This book explores the tensions within Cambodia's foreign policy between a tight alignment with China, on the one hand, and Cambodia's commitment to the Association of the Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) as well as its delicate foreign policy diversification towards other major powers, on the other hand. It traces the long history of Cambodia's quest for survival from its bigger and historically antagonistic neighbours – the Thai and the Vietnamese – and its struggle for security and independence from the two neighbours and external major powers, particularly the United States and China. It discusses Cambodia's geopolitical predicaments deriving from its location of being sandwiched between powerful neighbours and limited strategic options available for the Kingdom. The book also assesses recent developments in Cambodia's relations with its neighbours and their implications for Cambodia's increasingly tight alignment with China in recent years. It considers the extent to which the ruling regime in Cambodia depends on strong relations with China for its legitimacy and survival and argues that there are risks and danger for Cambodia in moving towards an increasingly tight alignment with China.

Chanborey Cheunboran is the Programme Director of the Asian Vision Institute and an advisor to the Cambodian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation. He obtained his PhD in International Political and Strategic Studies from The Australian National University; Master in Public Management from the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore, in conjunction with the Harvard Kennedy School; Master of Diplomacy and International Studies from Bangkok-based Rangsit University; and Bachelor of Arts in International Relations from the Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam.

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To Sopheap and Neakrica

Contents

Acronyms

ADB	Asian Development Bank
ADMM	ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting
ADMM-Plus	ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus
AIIB	Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank
AMM	ASEAN Ministerial Meeting
APT	ASEAN Plus Three
ARF	ASEAN Regional Forum
ASEAN	Association of the Southeast Asian Nations
ASEM	Asia-Europe Meeting
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CDCF	Cambodia Development Cooperation Forum
CGDK	Coalition Government for Democratic Kampuchea
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CICA	Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia
CNRP	Cambodian National Rescue Party
COC	Code of Conduct
CPP	Cambodian People's Party
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DOC	Declaration of the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea
DK	Democratic Kampuchea
DRV	Democratic Republic of Vietnam
EBA	Everything But Arms
ELCs	Economic Land Concessions
EU	European Union
FOIP	Free and Open Indo-Pacific
FUNCIPEC	National United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful, and Cooperative Cambodia
GMS	Greater Mekong Sub-region
IAI	Initiative for ASEAN Integration
ICC	International Criminal Court
ICJ	International Court of Justice

IMF	International Monetary Fund
ITLOS	International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
KPNLF	Khmer People's National Liberation Front
KR	Khmer Republic
LANGO	Law on Associations and Non-governmental Organisations
LMI	Lower Mekong Initiative
MLC	Mekong-Lancang Cooperation
MPAC	Master Plan of ASEAN Connectivity
MSR	Maritime Silk Road
NASC	New Asian Security Concept
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NDI	National Democratic Institute
NGOs	Non-governmental Organisations
NIDP	National Industrial Development Plan
OBOR	One Belt One Road
ODA	Official Development Assistance
PAD	People's Alliance for Democracy
PRC	People's Republic of China
PRK	People's Republic of Kampuchea
R2P	Responsibility to Protect
RCAF	Royal Cambodian Armed Forces
RGNUK	Royal Government of National Union of Kampuchea
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organisation
SEANWFZ	Southeast Asia Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone
SEATO	Southeast Asia Treaty Organization
SNC	Supreme National Council
SOC	State of Cambodia
SRF	Silk Road Fund
TAC	Treaty of Amity and Cooperation
TPP	Trans-Pacific Partnership
UDD	United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UNTAC	United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia
WTO	World Trade Organization
ZOPFAN	Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality

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This book is the outcome of my PhD research from 2015 to 2019 at the Australian National University under the generous Endeavour Postgraduate Scholarship from the Australian Department of Education and Training. I, therefore, gratefully acknowledge the financial support from the Australian Government and people.

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Introduction

Conventional wisdom suggests that the international system leaves small states less room to manoeuvre and that survival is always their most fundamental foreign policy goal. Cambodia is not excluded from this wisdom. Since the Kingdom retained its independence from France in 1953, Cambodian leaders have been preoccupied with the protection of its independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity. To this end, Cambodia's foreign policymakers had tried various approaches during the Cold War, from proclaimed neutrality to alignment with major powers and, worst of all, isolationism. Still, Cambodia remained a victim of the great power politics, which resulted in a prolonged civil war and the worst massacre of the twentieth century.

At the dawn of the twenty-first century, China has emerged as a regional and global actor, whose power and influence can be felt in all corners of the globe, most evidently in continental Southeast Asia. Since the mid-1990s, countries in Southeast Asia have recalibrated their foreign policy towards Beijing due to the rise of China and its implications for the changing security landscape in the Asia-Pacific region. Against this backdrop, Cambodia-China bilateral relations have experienced a remarkable transformation over the last two decades. The bilateral ties have been noticeably consolidated and promoted to a higher plane in the aftermath of armed clashes between the Cambodian People's Party (CPP) and the royalist party of the National United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful, and Cooperative Cambodia (FUNCIPEC) on 5–6 July 1997.[1] In December 2010, the two countries upgraded their bilateral relations into a 'Comprehensive Strategic Partnership of Cooperation.'

Obviously, the strengthening of the Cambodia-China relationship has been the result of China's increasingly important role in Cambodia's socio-economic development as the Kingdom's main trading partner, its biggest source of foreign direct investment (FDI), and its top provider of development assistance and soft loans. Moreover, China has also become the top provider of military assistance to Cambodia. It is worth noting that Chinese military assistance increased remarkably at a time Cambodia badly needed to build up its military forces due to the increasingly tense border dispute with Thailand from 2008 to 2011. Historically, Cambodia's primary concern has long been the safeguarding of its independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity, particularly against its bigger and

stronger neighbouring countries – Thailand and Vietnam. The Cambodian people in general still harbour suspicion and even fear of potential threats from these two neighbours. Therefore, it can be argued that the promotion of Cambodia's ties with China goes beyond economic benefits as the bilateral relationship is of strategic importance for Cambodia to ensure its territorial integrity and survival.

Interestingly, Phnom Penh's rapid strengthening of its ties with China over the last two decades has generated three key puzzles. First, Prime Minister Hun Sen's mistrust of Beijing was profound due to China's support for the Khmer Rouge and its close ties with the Cambodian royal family during and after the Cambodian civil war from 1970 to 1993. Tellingly, in his 1988 political essay, Hun Sen argued that "China was the root of all that was evil in Cambodia."[2] However, as China's influence had rapidly increased in Southeast Asia, Cambodian leaders, including the Prime Minister himself, declared on many occasions that China is Cambodia's 'most trustworthy friend.' Second, the structural realist school of thought suggests that states, including the small ones, tend to readjust their foreign policy in accordance with the structural changes at the systemic level. In Southeast Asia, China emerged as a key regional player and, controversially from the perspective of some countries, a potential threat to the regional stability and the security of smaller states in the region after the end of the Cold War. As a result, the Association of the Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and its member states responded to this structural change by strengthening their defence capacity and creating regional security cooperation mechanisms, including the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in 1994. As for Cambodia, however, the fundamental shift of its strategic direction has been triggered by domestic political dynamics. Unlike the rest of the region, Cambodia's perception of China gradually changed from mistrust to partnership in the aftermath of the July 1997 armed clashes in Phnom Penh as Beijing emerged as the CPP's new partner that could provide the latter with economic and political breathing space. More importantly, Cambodia's strategic direction towards China took a new turn in the early 2010s, primarily due to the 2008–2011 Cambodia-Thailand border dispute and Cambodia's tense relations with Vietnam following the failure of the 45th Foreign Ministers' Meeting of ASEAN to issue a joint communiqué under the Cambodian Chairmanship in July 2012, known as Phnom Penh fiasco. Third, after joining ASEAN in 1999, the regional grouping became the cornerstone of Cambodia's foreign policy. Cambodian leaders were strongly convinced that ASEAN would play an important role in helping Cambodia to promote its economic development and to safeguard its sovereignty and territorial integrity. Therefore, a puzzle is that Phnom Penh has recently been perceived to prioritise its ties with China over ASEAN, allegedly on the South China Sea issue.

Evidently, China has increasingly become Cambodia's important economic and strategic partner. Cambodia's move closer towards Beijing has recently invited a myriad of criticisms and accusations based on the perceived regression of democracy and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the lack of political willingness of the Cambodian government for genuine political reforms. On top of that, there has been the accusation that China's increasing political and

economic clout in Cambodia has eroded the Kingdom's independence, which has negatively impacted its image in ASEAN and beyond. More dangerously, Cambodia's increasingly closer ties with China have also alienated other major powers and its neighbours as well as domestic forces. This might invite foreign powers' intervention into Cambodia's domestic politics that would unfortunately disturb the peace, political stability, and economic development of the Kingdom.

In theory, Cambodia-China bilateral ties are asymmetric between a small state and a great power in which the smaller side might, to a certain extent, experience risks and vulnerabilities because it has to compromise on its sovereignty and foreign policy autonomy. The most referable example is the criticism over the role of Cambodia as the Chair of ASEAN during the 2012 Phnom Penh fiasco. Cambodia has been blamed for the ASEAN diplomatic crisis allegedly due to enormous Chinese pressure. In the aftermath of the Phnom Penh fiasco, Cambodia has been seen as ASEAN's maverick and China's de facto proxy within ASEAN.[3] Since then, Cambodia's foreign policy has attracted considerable attention from an increasing number of scholars and political commentators, who mostly argue that Cambodia has been bought by Chinese largesse. Such an observation fails to deeply comprehend the strategic and economic interests as well as the security concerns with which Cambodian foreign policymakers have been preoccupied. This book, therefore, attempts to provide a deep and comprehensive explanation of Cambodia's foreign policy through an examination of the history of the country's search for survival and security, its diplomatic tradition, its political and economic imperatives, and Cambodian leaders' worldview on the future of Asia and the international order as well as their implications on their country

More importantly, this book seeks to make both an empirical and a conceptual contribution to the existing literature on Cambodia's foreign policy in general and its foreign relations with China in particular. It is worth mentioning that there is a huge gap in the body of literature on Cambodia's foreign policy in general and Cambodia-China relations in particular. There are only a few scholarly works on Cambodia's foreign policy, which include publications by, among others: (1) Michael Leifer, *Cambodia: The Search for Security* (1967); (2) Roger Smith, *Cambodia's Foreign Policy* (1965); (3) Kao Kim Hourn, *Cambodia's Foreign Policy and ASEAN: From Non-alignment to Engagement* (2002); (4) Pou Sothirak, Geoff Wade and Mark Hong (eds.), *Cambodia: Progress and Challenges since 1991* (2012); and, most recently, (4) Deth Sok Udom, Sun Suon, and Serkan Bulut (eds.), *Cambodia's Foreign Relations in Regional and Global Contexts* (2018). These books offer useful insights on Cambodia's foreign policy. However, while some works are not entirely up to date to the changing strategic environment that is affecting Cambodia, others do not provide a solid and in-depth discussion on Cambodia's foreign policy towards China. In fact, this subject matter remains significantly understudied.

As far as Cambodia-China foreign relations are concerned, there is only one book by Sophie Richardson that is devoted in its entirety to the bilateral relationship – *China, Cambodia and the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence* (2010). Indeed, it significantly contributes to the body of knowledge on

Cambodia-China relations. However, the book mainly focuses on China's foreign policy towards Cambodia, not the other way around. In addition, its analysis is mostly based on historical perspectives, precisely China's relations with Cambodia during the Cold War and the early 1990s. Therefore, this book is an important, original, and timely scholarly work that will definitely contribute to the filling of the literature gap on Cambodia's foreign policy, especially its relations with China. From a historical perspective, although the primary scope of this book focuses on Cambodia's foreign policy towards China from 1997 to 2018, it is the first attempt to study Cambodia's past strategic options and factors shaping the choices since the collapse of the Angkor Empire in 1431. Contemporarily, it is the first scholarly work on Cambodia's foreign policy towards China undertaken from a security perspective. Conceptually, it examines strategic options available for Cambodia and risks and vulnerabilities the choices might bring about for this small state. Those options range from military alliance to regionalism, as detailed in Chapter 1. Based on existing conceptual frameworks, the author of this book develops tight and loose alignments as new frameworks to understand the strategic options of small states. The author posits that loose alignment is the most cost-effective and autonomy-preserving strategy for Cambodia and other small states that need to draw upon the support and assistance from the great powers. It, therefore, hopes to offer valuable lessons and an important source of reference for small states that are confronted with similar security and foreign policy dilemmas as Cambodia.

Scope and method

Cambodia-China bilateral ties can be traced back to the early twelfth century, when Zhou Daguan led a Chinese diplomatic expedition and cultural mission to the Khmer Empire in Angkor, the ancient capital of Cambodia. However, after the decline of the Khmer Empire in the early fifteenth century, the Khmer were from time to time under the suzerainty of their neighbours – the Thai and later the Vietnamese – and thus Cambodia-China contacts were reduced to the minimum. In the post-colonial period, China became an important player in Cambodia's foreign policy. Cambodian leaders, particularly Norodom Sihanouk, saw China as a potential protector of Cambodia's territorial integrity and sovereignty against its rapacious neighbours. As a result, Cambodia was among the first countries in Southeast Asia to establish diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1958. China remained a staunch ally of Sihanouk after the collapse of his reign in 1970, which prompted Beijing to close its embassy in Phnom Penh. After the 1991 Paris Peace Agreements, which led to the creation of the second Kingdom of Cambodia in 1993, China began to exert its influence over Cambodia. As a result, Cambodia-China bilateral relations have been rapidly promoted. Phnom Penh has recently been seen as one of the closest friends, if not an ally, of China in Southeast Asia.

This book, however, focuses primarily on important developments of Cambodia's relations with China from 1997 to early 2019. The year 1997 has been

considered a turning point of the Cambodia-China relationship in the post-civil war Cambodia. Noticeably, in the aftermath of the deadly clashes on 5–6 July 1997 between the loyalists of the CPP led by then Second Prime Minister Hun Sen and those of the FUNCIPEC party headed by First Prime Minister Prince Norodom Ranariddh, the Hun Sen regime was isolated again, politically and financially. Western countries considered it a coup by Hun Sen and froze their foreign assistance to Cambodia. ASEAN suspended Cambodia's membership, which was supposed to join the association, along with Laos and Myanmar, in July 1997. The United Nations (UN) condemned the crisis as acts of violence and kept Cambodia's seat vacant. In contrast, while reiterating the principle of non-interference, China urged all conflicting parties to find a peaceful resolution to the Cambodian political crisis. Not long after the crisis, China recognised the Hun Sen government and delivered USD2.8 million worth of military assistance to Cambodia.[4]

Indeed, Beijing provided limited space for Cambodia to deal with international pressure and to resist forces loyal to FUNCINPEC, as well as Khmer Rouge remnants along the Cambodia-Thailand border. Ever since, Cambodia and China have continuously strengthened their bilateral relations. More noticeably, Cambodia has further strengthened its relations with China into a much higher level following the Cambodia-Thailand armed border clashes from 2008 to 2011. The border conflict reminded Cambodian leaders that their neighbouring countries remain threats to their country's security and territorial integrity. The border dispute also prompted Cambodian leaders to question ASEAN's role in protecting small and weak member states like Cambodia. As a result, Phnom Penh adopted an alignment with Beijing. By 2014, China became the biggest economic benefactor and the most important strategic partner of Cambodia. This book provides analysis on Cambodia's foreign policy towards China till the end of 2018.

The book is based on the author's doctoral dissertation at the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, ANU College of Asia and the Pacific, from February 2015 to February 2019. Generally, there are two ways of approaching this study. Deductively, it can be approached with a general theory and then one can see how far this particular case conforms or does not conform to the theoretical preposition. For instance, the mainstream theory in international relations (IR), as discussed in the following chapter, might suggest that small states facing unfriendly and historically antagonistic neighbours, like Cambodia, would seek the help of external power(s), especially when the external power(s) is at odds with their hostile neighbours. The case of Cambodia seeking the support and assistance of China could then be seen as illustrating the theory. Alternatively, an inductive approach can be taken by looking at the case itself in order to observe and detect patterns and compelling factors that will be used to conceptualise Cambodia's foreign policy. It is a useful approach due to the fact that any particular case is often more complex than envisaged in a general theory and does not always fit expectations derived from any particular theory. It is also because the foreign policy behaviour of small states might vary enormously from case to case, reflecting a wide range of factors, both external and domestic, in the countries in question. This approach is essentially historical and narrative but does not ignore

theoretical insights where relevant. It does not hope to formulate a theory but to suggest ways in which related theories can be modified in order to take account of a broader range of possibilities.

It is the latter approach that has been adopted in this book. The data obtained through secondary sources, policy content analysis, elite interviewing, and survey research have been carefully studied and analysed in order to (1) detect the patterns of Cambodia's foreign policy; (2) identify the compelling factors shaping Cambodia's foreign policy towards China; and (3) conceptualise this foreign policy direction. To this end, the research employs both primary and secondary sources of data collection. In terms of primary sources, the author of this book made use of his broad existing networks in both track I and track II channels in Cambodia and beyond. He conducted fieldworks in Cambodia from September to November 2017 and in May 2018, where he made around 45 interviews with senior foreign policymakers of Cambodia at key ministries such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, the Ministry of National Defence, and the Ministry of Economic and Finance for in-depth interviews to dig up the rationales, motives, and options of Cambodia's foreign policy towards China. As far as track II channels are concerned, a number of prominent scholars at key think tanks and academic institutions in Cambodia and China were contacted for in-depth interviews for their assessments on Cambodia's recent foreign policy postures on China. Meanwhile, the author of this book also conducted informal surveys with 50 PhD students at one university in Phnom Penh in order to find out their attitudes and perceptions related to economic and security opportunities and challenges for Cambodia, as well as their assessments on Cambodia's current foreign policy direction towards China.

Last but not least, secondary data collection has been focused on books, academic journals, newspapers, leaders' speeches, and government publications for the purposes of writing literature review, theoretical frameworks, and other relevant chapters of the research. The author also visited a number of libraries and archive centres, including but not limited to the National Archives of Cambodia, the Documentation Centre of Cambodia, the Royal Academy of Cambodia, the National Library of Cambodia, and the National Library of Australia.

Plan of the book

This book is comprised of nine chapters. Chapter 1 reviews the existing literature on small state foreign policy by highlighting strategic options available for small states to address their security challenges, as well as strengths and weaknesses of each choice. Those options include regionalism, neutrality and non-alignment, bandwagoning, balancing, hedging strategy, alliance, and alignment. Building upon the existing literature, the author of this book develops two new conceptual frameworks: tight and loose alignment. He argues that loose alignment is the most autonomy-preserving strategy for small states that need the support of and assistance from major powers.

Chapter 2 provides a historical sketch of Cambodia's search for security and survival. To this end, it attempts to answer four key questions: (1) What was the role of Cambodia's predatory neighbours in the collapse of the Angkor Empire? (2) What were the security implications of the demise of the Khmer Empire on Cambodia's strategic direction? (3) How had Cambodia addressed its security challenges over the seven centuries that followed the fall of Angkor in 1431? (4) What was the role of China in Cambodia's past strategic options?

Chapter 3 touches upon the important developments of Cambodia-China bilateral ties from 1997 to 2008. As mentioned earlier, the year 1997 has been seen as the turning point of the Cambodia-China relations in the post-conflict Cambodia. In this regard, this chapter attempts to identify the rationales and motives behind the transformation of the bilateral relations by focusing on domestic developments in Cambodia as well as regional and international contexts that influenced Cambodia's foreign policy. It also highlights the constraints and challenges related to Cambodia's efforts to promote its ties with China. During the course of 1997–2008, the author of this book argues that Cambodia's foreign policy towards China was part of the Kingdom's hedging strategy to maximise benefits from all partners and to play one potential threat against the others in a way that could provide Phnom Penh more room to manoeuvre.

Chapter 4 underscores Cambodia's revived mistrust towards its bigger and historically antagonistic neighbours – Thailand and Vietnam. The eruption of the Cambodia-Thailand border conflict from 2008 to 2011 reminded Cambodian leaders that their stronger neighbour(s) remained a threat to Cambodia's security and territorial integrity. The conflict also prompted Cambodian foreign policymakers to question ASEAN's role in helping Cambodia to address its security challenges due to Phnom Penh's perception that the regional grouping is ineffective in dealing with the border dispute. As a result, Cambodia's alignment with China took shape. Moreover, Cambodia has also experienced tense relations with its neighbour to the east, Vietnam, due to the complex border issue, the politicisation of the ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia, and the different positions of the two countries on the South China Sea. The author of this book claims that the deterioration of Cambodia-Vietnam relations since 2012 further pushed Cambodia's alignment with China.

Chapter 5 draws attention to China's growing influence in Southeast Asia and its implications for Cambodia's strategic direction. This influence underlines Southeast Asia's perception of and response to the rise of China as a regional and global power, as well as its implications for Cambodia's foreign policy. This chapter also accentuates Cambodia's hard choice between ASEAN regionalism and its alignment with China, by investigating Cambodia's evolving positions on the South China Sea, which is one of the pressing issues in ASEAN-China relations. By tracking Cambodia's changing positions on the issue, the author of this book hopes to shed light on the Kingdom's strategic shift towards China.

Chapter 6 examines Cambodia's alignment politics with the great powers. In other words, it attempts to entertain a question: if not China, which major powers can Cambodia rely upon? To this end, this chapter highlights Cambodia's relations

with four major powers, namely Japan, the US, France, and Russia. It argues that Phnom Penh has tried to embark upon foreign policy diversification. However, Cambodia's alignment with other major powers is limited. Among the four major powers mentioned earlier, Cambodia has placed its bet only on Japan through the establishment of the Cambodia-Japan strategic partnership in 2013. Moreover, Cambodia's strategic configurations towards China and Japan carry different weight in favour of the former due to the perception in Phnom Penh that Tokyo's military and strategic role in the region is limited.

Chapter 7 investigates to what extent Cambodia's domestic political dynamics shape the country's foreign policy towards China. To be more precise, it tries to investigate the extent to which Phnom Penh's search for regime survival drives Cambodia's relations with China. The author of this book claims that China's 'no-strings attached' assistance and economic engagement provide a conducive environment for the ruling CPP to maintain and promote its legitimacy and popularity for three main reasons. First, China's foreign aid and investment simulate economic growth and job creation, which are crucial to promote the performance-based legitimacy of the ruling elite. Second, China's 'no-strings attached' assistance and unconditional investment practice benefits the ruling elite as the political and economic systems in Cambodia are closely intertwined in a form of neo-patrimonialism. Third, due to China's rapidly growing political and economic clout, Beijing is not only a source of inspiration but also a shield that leaders in Phnom Penh can use to cushion pressures and criticisms from the West while they opt for repressive means, when necessary, to ensure their grip on power.

Chapter 8 highlights the costs and vulnerabilities Cambodia might face from its asymmetric relationship with China as it becomes increasingly dependent on this great power. This chapter looks at the potential implications of China's growing influence over Cambodia over four main policy realms: (1) democratisation; (2) socio-economic and environmental risks; (3) foreign policy autonomy; and (4) national security.

Chapter 9 sums up key findings related to the compelling factors shaping Cambodia's foreign policy towards China as well as the constraints and challenges that Phnom Penh is facing from its increasing alignment with Beijing. It also seeks to conceptualise Cambodia's strategic direction towards China, and proposes some recommendations for Cambodian foreign policymakers and strategists to maximise benefits from the rise of China while minimising potential risks and challenges that might be derived from Cambodia's asymmetric relationship with China. Finally, this book is concluded with some lessons learnt from Cambodia's foreign policy and their implications for other small states in the developing world that are facing a similar geopolitical predicament as Cambodia.

Notes

1 An abbreviation in French for *Front uni national pour un Cambodge indépendant, neutre, pacifique, et coopératif* or National United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful, and Cooperative Cambodia.

2 Julio Jeldres, "Cambodia's Relation with China: A Steadfast Friendship," in Pou Sothirak et al. (eds.), *Cambodia: Progress and Challenges since 1991* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies).
3 See Kishore Mahbubani, "Is China Losing the Diplomatic Plot?" *Project Syndicate* (26 July 2012). Accessed 3 March 2015: www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/is-china-losing-the-diplomatic-plot?barrier=accesspaylog; Kavi Chongkittavorn, "Cambodia Remains ASEAN's Maverick," *The Nation* (16 July 2016). Accessed 18 July 2016: www.nationmultimedia.com/opinion/Cambodia-remains-Aseans-maverick-30290816.html
4 Long Kosal, "Sino-Cambodian Relations," CICP Working Paper No. 2 (2009).

1 Conceptual frameworks

Small states and strategic options

The international system has experienced fundamental changes in the last half century, with strong implications for small states. Jean Hey confidently asserts that small states today enjoy more international prestige and visibility than at any time in history.[1] The study of small states has, therefore, attracted an increasing attention from academics and students of IR. The end of the Cold War, to some extent, has ensured that small states in the developing world are less likely to be pawns in the global competition of the great powers. Undeniably, small states are playing an increasingly important role in the international system. The former Secretary-General of the UN Ban Ki-moon suggests that "small states – which are more than half of the UN's members – routinely drive substantive and structural issues at the UN, as they strive to uphold and develop international principles."[2] Nevertheless, threats and security challenges facing small states remain looming. Thus, foreign policymakers of small states must not lose sight of the security risks and vulnerabilities due to the fact that the survival of small states remains fragile and that international institutions are often ineffective and unresponsive to address their security concerns. The security threats and vulnerabilities that small states face have been manifested countless times throughout human history. Through his observation of the Peloponnesian War (431–404 BC), Thucydides came to the powerful conclusion that has influenced IR over the past millennium: "the strong do what they have the power to do and the weak suffer what they must."[3]

This chapter, therefore, attempts to review and fill a gap in the existing literature on small state foreign policy. It deals with the key characteristics of small states as well as the security challenges that they face in the international system. Most importantly, this chapter seeks to highlight strategic options available for small states to address their security challenges as well as the strengths and weaknesses of each option. The literature reviews on small state strategic options are crucially relevant to understand Cambodia's foreign policy behaviour. However, the author claims that the existing literature on small state strategic options is not conceptually nuanced and empirically precise enough to explain the foreign policy behaviour of some small states like Cambodia. In this regard, building upon the existing body of knowledge, the author proposes two conceptions – tight and loose alignment – to be discussed in detail in the following sections.

Key characteristics of small states

There is no scholarly consensus on the meaning of small states. Small states are often misunderstood as weak states, which are generally referred to as states that are weak or ineffective in their core domestic functions of providing security and basic public goods and services, and experience limited or contested legitimacy with their people. Attempts to define small states include various attributes such as geographical location, population size, psychological and material capability, the perception of leaders, and the degree of influence of the small state in question on the international system. David Vital says small states are those that have a population between 10 and 15 million for economically advanced countries and 20–30 million for undeveloped countries.[4] Barston, on the other hand, adopts a population upper limit of 10–15 million as the benchmark to define small states.[5] The threshold is significantly lowered in a joint study between the Commonwealth Secretariat and the World Bank in 2000, as a small state is defined as the one whose population is 1.5 million or less.[6] Clearly, the size of the population is one of the necessary dimensions of small states. However, population-based definitions of small states fail to provide a comprehensive understanding of smallness and its dynamics. In fact, the population size is just one of the factors determining the influence and status of a state in the international system. Roderick Pace notices that the European Union (EU) will very soon be dominated by states with a population of less than 10 million.[7] However, it is obvious that the EU member states – individually and collectively – have a strong influence on the world thanks to their financial, military, and normative contributions to the international community.

Robert Rothstein further develops the definition of small states by emphasising the psychological and material dimensions. He postulates that "a small power is a state which recognizes that it cannot obtain security primarily by using its own capabilities, and that it must rely fundamentally on the aid of other states, institutions, processes, or development to do so."[8] He also points out three unique aspects of a small state: (1) outside help is required; (2) the state has a narrow margin of safety, with little time for correcting mistakes; and (3) the state's leaders see its weakness as essentially unalterable.

Although Rothstein's conception captures the nuance of vulnerabilities of smallness and weakness, it reveals a clear shortcoming due to the fact that only a very few countries in the contemporary world are excluded from the category. Tellingly, even Japan and South Korea still require outside assistance, particularly from the United States (US), to address their security threats from North Korea and, to larger extent, China. Robert Keohane recommends that pundits in the field should focus on the systemic role that leaders see their countries playing. He, hence, suggests three distinct categories of states in the international system as follows:

> A great power is a state whose leaders consider that it can alone exercise a large, perhaps decisive, impact on the international system; a middle power is a state whose leaders consider that it cannot act alone effectively but may be

> able to have a systematic impact in a small group or through an international institution; and a small power is a state whose leaders consider that it can never, acting alone or in a small group, make a significant impact on the system.[9]

A significant drawback of Keohane's definition is that small states do not always endeavour to make an impact on the international system but, most of the time, promote their national interests, primarily the preservation of their survival and the pursuit of prosperity. Certainly, only great powers can have the interest and power to shape and influence the international system. In a recent study, Steinmetz and Wivel apply relative capability to conceptualise small states in Europe by defining a small state as "the weak part in an asymmetric relationship."[10] Moreover, there are attempts to explain the nature of small states by looking at their common characteristics and foreign policy behaviour. For instance, the Commonwealth Consultative Group considers small states to have "inherent vulnerability," defined as the "susceptibility to the risk of harm."[11] Similarly, Hans Morgenthau aptly captured the political vulnerabilities by articulating the view that small states "have always owed their independence either to the balance of power . . . or to the preponderance of protecting power, or to their lack of attractiveness for imperialistic aspirations."[12] Although his last point is difficult to prove one way or the other, there have been numerous cases of small states that have been victims of the ambitious military policies of their larger neighbours. The US attack against Grenada in 1982 and its invasion and occupation of Haiti from 1994 to 1995, the Iraqi invasion and occupation of Kuwait in 1990, and the Russian invasion of Georgia in 2008 clearly illustrate the vulnerability of small states. Therefore, it becomes the conventional wisdom that a key difference between big and small states is that the latter cannot take their own survival for granted.

As far as foreign policy behaviour is concerned, in the absence of a potent military capability, small states tend to give more salience to diplomacy as a strategy to cope with their political vulnerabilities by "developing positive techniques of diplomacy to compensate for their limitations, including occasional judicious use of bold initiatives."[13] Similarly, Hey argues that a global 'class structure' deprives small states of the option of using force in the way that larger states could and that there was general agreement that small states would seek out multilateral organisations and alliances to ensure their security and achieve foreign policy goals.[14] Keohane, Nye, Persaud, and Ikenberry, among others, share the similar view that weak states see international institutions as opportunities to build coalitions and strengthen ties with other weak states through the "bastions of rules, norms, and principles" and therefore increase their "bargaining position within the international system."[15]

Hey summarises the most commonly cited behaviours of small states: they tend to (a) exhibit a low level of participation in world affairs; (b) address a narrow scope of foreign policy issues; (c) limit their behaviour to their immediate geographic arena; (d) employ diplomatic and economic foreign policy instruments, as opposed to military instruments; (e) emphasise internationalist principles, international law, and other morally minded ideals; (f) secure multinational agreements and join multinational institutions whenever possible; (g) choose neutral

positions; (h) rely on superpowers for protection, partnerships, and resources; (i) aim to cooperate and to avoid conflict with others; and (j) spend a disproportionate amount of foreign policy resources on ensuring physical and political security and survival.[16] Hey's long list contains some self-contradicting features of small states, and those features are not unique to small states. This can vividly suggest that the definitions of small states are complex and dependent on whether scholars can identify the conditions under which small states choose among courses of action available to them. Therefore, it is difficult to define small states solely based on their foreign policy behaviour, as small states must try all approaches, exhaust all means to ensure their survival, obtain material wealth, and exert influence on the international system. In this study, nevertheless, a small state is defined relatively based on its relations with the rest of the world, with three characteristics, namely (1) a relatively small size population between 5 and 10 million people for economically advanced countries and from 10 to 20 million for developing countries; (2) a weaker side in an asymmetric relationship that has to confront with more risks and vulnerabilities compared to the stronger party; and (3) unlike the stronger side of the relationship, survival is the primary concern in its relations with the rest of the international community. The rationale for the inclusion of the three characteristics is that the smallness of a state is determined not only by material capability but also by its relations to others, as well as the psychological attributes that leaders of the state inherit. Although population size is not the only sufficient criterion to define a small state, it is an important element of smallness as population is associated with economic potential and military mobilisation of the small state in question. It also shapes the psychological orientation of the ruling elites of the state in their conduct of foreign and security policy.

Strategic options of small states

In the realm of international politics, risks and challenges are multiple. Security is widely understood as the preservation and protection of the core values of a nation, including political independence and territorial integrity from external threats.[17] This narrow conception of security is commonly referred to as traditional security. In this regard, small states are vulnerable because of geographic condition, small population, the lack of economic and military strength, and the absence of strategic depth. Azar and Moon expand the core values to cover not only political independence and territorial integrity but also non-traditional security issues, such as economic development and public welfare, the organic survival of the national population, and communal harmony.[18] Clearly, security is not only about the national security of states but also linked to the survival of non-state actors. From a theoretical perspective, Sorpong Peou notices that the objects of security can be different, including states, political regimes, societies, and individuals.[19]

Undeniably, states around the world, especially the small and the weak, are confronting mounting threats from non-traditional security issues. However, traditional security issues remain the primary concern of leaders in small states. Traditional security challenges are particularly prevalent in the Asia-Pacific region.

Geopolitical and strategic competition still exists and has been increasingly evident recently as a result of the rise of China, the emergence of India, the rebalancing strategy of the US towards Asia, and the recalibration of the Japanese role and influence in the region. Consequently, there are many foreign policy dilemmas and choices that small states like Cambodia have to make and navigate. In this regard, the main task of leaders in small states is to maximise their country's interest and in the meanwhile avoid being trapped in the great powers competition. Moreover, territorial disputes and historical mistrust between countries in the region remain the key source of insecurity. Those issues need only the right occasion to explode into conflicts. The maritime disputes in the East and South China Sea, the 2008–2011 Cambodia-Thailand border conflict, and the China-India border dispute are illustrative cases.

Regardless of their nature and origins, security risks are especially harmful to small states, in part because their small size tends to invite external exploitation. It is also because they lack the necessary resources to absorb structural shocks and to mitigate the risks by themselves. In this regard, great powers often play a crucial role in small states' risk management. In other words, limited capabilities and a narrow margin for error induce small states to align with great power(s) in order to ensure their survival and to meet their security challenges. However, great powers' roles are two-folded, which can impact small states in different ways. On the one hand, great powers may throw their weight behind small states' elite and provide them with the needed resources to mitigate certain risks, such as looming military threats or enduring economic hardship. On the other hand, great powers may put smaller states at risk as the former may turn their might to impose their will on actors within their sphere of influence. Worst still, the great powers may invade small states for their resources, or for political domination, or for the simple reason to punish them.

Broadly, any option small states select depends on various factors. Empirically, to overcome security risks and vulnerabilities small states adopt different strategic options based on the international and regional contexts affecting the states in question, as well as their capacity, domestic context, and judgement of leaders at a given point in time. According to Vital, the choice of policy of a small state depends on (a) the external or international environment; (b) its human and material resources; (c) the condition of the state's administrative and military machinery at a particular time; (d) the ability of the leaders to marshal the national resources for political purposes as well as their character and ambitions; and (e) the nature of the society in question and the predominant view of the value and importance to be attached to the state.[20] The predicament of small states is such that they have a small margin of error as a small strategic mistake could trigger political instability and insecurity and worst of all their disappearance from the map of the world. Therefore, nothing is taken for granted and nothing is guaranteed. The First Prime Minister and founder of the tiny island of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew, pointed out this reality as he candidly suggested:

> In an imperfect world, we have to search for the best accommodation possible. And no accommodation is permanent. If it lasts long enough for progress

> to be made until the next set of arrangements can be put in place, let us be grateful for it.[21]

Regionalism

Small states might reduce their vulnerability by binding together through regionalism in order to increase their relevance and usefulness in shaping regional and international order. In addition to economic opportunities, regionalism provides three security roles: conflict prevention, conflict containment, and conflict termination.[22] Stephen Krasner suggests that by joining regional and international organisations and then attempting to influence "the rules of the games" to their favour, small states can achieve the primary goal in world politics of attaining power, control, and wealth.[23] Rothstein seems to encourage small states to embrace multilateralism rather than bilateral alignment with a single great power by stating:

> A small power ought to prefer mixed, multilateral alliances. . . . An alliance with a single great power ought to be chosen only if all the other alternatives are proscribed, and if the small power fears an imminent attack – and even then only in hopes of improving its deterrence stance.[24]

Luxembourg provides a good example that contradicts the conventional wisdom that a small state cannot be an influential foreign policy actor in regional and global affairs. Despite being nestled between European regional giants – France and Germany – Luxembourg's international influence has long belied its reputation as a very small state due to its participation in the EU regional integration.[25] The EU is believed to have reached a mature security regionalism in which its member states co-exist in peace and prosperity. Kishore Mahbubani asserts that "today, there are not just zero wars between any two EU member states. There is zero prospect of war. This is the highest civilisational achievement any organisation can have."[26] Singapore is another case to illustrate that it is in the interest of small states to promote regionalism and multilateralism. According to S.R. Nathan, former president of Singapore, as a small state in a dangerous and uncertain world, Singapore "must attach its interests to something larger, whether it is ASEAN, the UN or international regimes."[27] Moreover, Singapore is also a strong supporter of a rules-based regional and international order. The simple rationale is that a rules-based system is a key to ensure the equality and survival of small countries, like Singapore, so that all members regardless of size play by the same rules.[28]

Certainly, in Southeast Asia, the relevance of ASEAN regionalism rests on the existence of regional aspirations for security community among ASEAN leaders, the near absence of war between or among ASEAN members, a relatively high degree of political integration at the elite level, and finally the emergence of a sophisticated discourse of regional community.[29] Many might agree that ASEAN's greatest achievements are its prevention of war among its member states, the promotion of prosperity in the region, and its ability to lead multilateral

arrangements, including the ARF, ASEAN Plus Three (ASEAN members plus China, Japan, and South Korea; APT), and the East Asia Summit (EAS). Countries in the region, especially small states like Cambodia, have tremendously benefited from the dividends of relative peace and prosperity ASEAN has generated. ASEAN has facilitated continuous dialogues between states whose relations had been ruptured or politicised by events which have created "opportunities for diffuse reciprocity" as well as a considerable range of cooperative activity that "buffers intra-regional relations from sharper conflicts."[30] Equally importantly, regional institutions, such as ASEAN, can be of importance in institutional balancing. It is a strategy in which states attempt to address potential threats not by traditional military means but by the institutionalisation of norms and rules to either socialise or impose collective pressure and thus constrain the behaviour of the threatening state.[31] As ASEAN is facing uncertainties and challenges as a result of the rise of China, Kai He posits that ASEAN has adopted various institutional instruments, such as the ARF, EAS, and the ASEAN Community, to enable the region to be relevant and contribute to the promotion of the regional order.[32]

Nevertheless, there are certain shortcomings of regionalism and multilateralism, including the lack of compliance in regional agreements and an effective dispute settlement mechanism. ASEAN's ineffective response to Cambodia-Thailand border skirmishes from 2008 to 2011 is a clear illustration. The case suggests that power politics remains, to some extent, a practice in Asia in which bigger states bully their weaker neighbours without significant costs. Moreover, most governments in Southeast Asia still harbour suspicions towards not only the external powers but also their immediate neighbours, which make it more difficult to build the trust needed for regional security arrangements to develop. Fundamentally, institutional balancing is by no means the only strategy that small states in Southeast Asia are pursuing to tackle their security concerns. Recent diplomatic and military tensions between China and ASEAN claimant states in the South China Sea have emboldened the Philippines and Vietnam to seek military assistance from external powers, including the US and Japan. Therefore, it is not naïve to suggest that multilateral institutions do not always address the security concerns of small states. Leszek Buszynski candidly points out to this reality by arguing:

> Regional institutionalism is a broad and long-term process that affects regions, but not individual states, especially the small and weak. . . . Small or weak state grievances on the periphery of the international community's field of attention may be subordinated to or sacrificed for the greater good of regional stability.[33]

In most parts of the world, a classic self-interested foreign policy remains the driving force for regional order. In fact, international and regional institutions are most of the time far from effective and responsive in addressing hard security issues of states, especially small and weak ones, because they are not yet in the position to withstand challenges on their own. In this regard, it is crucially important for small states to be attuned to the reality of international politics and

to consider multilateral institutions as well as the promotion of norms and rules as contributing, rather than as determinant factors, to ensure their survival in the world in which anarchy remains its characteristic.

Neutrality and non-alignment

Neutrality and non-alignment were popular among developing countries and small states during the Cold War, as they did not want to be dragged into the US-Soviet Union competition. Many of them have declared neutrality and non-alignment as the fundamental principles of their foreign policy. Neutrality refers to a "status that demands certain rights of the belligerents in time of war and accept certain obligations towards those belligerents."[34] By contrast, non-alignment is a status where a state denounces membership of any bloc. It is a proclamation that states stay aloof from a "priori alliance, notably military entanglements with any bloc or great power anywhere in the world."[35] One clear difference can be noticed, for neutrality is a status that comes into existence at the time of war while non-alignment is an obligation to stay aloof from competing states and groups of states in peacetime.

In practice, however, only a few small states have consistently adopted a foreign policy of neutrality and non-alignment, noticeably Switzerland and Austria and to a larger extent Finland and Ireland. Efraim Karsh notices that

> the chances that a large state will succeed in maintaining its neutrality are, ostensibly, better than those of a small power – due to the belligerents' awareness of the high cost of violating the large state's neutrality, on the one hand, and their hope that it will join the war on their side, on the other hand.[36]

A policy of neutrality and non-alignment is determined and motivated by a number of specific features of countries in questions, which include geography, history, as well as security and foreign policy concerns. More importantly, an agreement or consensus among the great powers is usually the most important ingredient for small states to successfully uphold the foreign policy of neutrality and non-alignment. Switzerland's neutrality since the 1815 Congress of Vienna was guaranteed by the European powers. Likewise, Austria's neutrality has been recognised and protected by the Big Four – Britain, France, the former Soviet Union, and the US.[37] Without the willingness and interests of the great powers to maintain their neutrality, small states would be eventually forced to relinquish their neutral stance and eventually take sides. Additionally, the structure of the international system and regional geopolitics strongly influence the strategic options of small states as to whether or not to adopt neutrality and non-alignment. The adoption of neutrality by Finland and Austria was "less a matter of choice than a pressing existential necessity," as these two small states were in the opposite side of the victorious Allied Powers and the immediate neighbours of the Soviet Union.[38] Both Finland and Austria did not have any illusions regarding Moscow's readiness to tolerate their alignment with the Western European powers.[39]

For most small states outside Western Europe, a foreign policy of neutrality and non-alignment is merely a political proclamation rather than a strategic choice. Naturally, small states' foreign relations with different foreign powers cannot objectively carry the same strategic, political, and economic weights. With the complexity of security issues, both traditional and non-traditional ones, it is imperative for small states to work closely with the great powers, and most of the time more closely with one power than another depending on the convergence of strategic interests between the small states and the great powers in question. Strategically, neutrality and non-alignment can be a version of a balancing strategy. As will be discussed in Chapter 2, Cambodia's neutrality and non-alignment in the 1950s could be understood as Sihanouk's implicit and delicate balancing act against different sets of threats: (1) the right and left wings in Cambodia; (2) Cambodia's neighbours, including Thailand, South Vietnam, and communist North Vietnam; and (3) China-US strategic competition in Indochina.

Presumably, a small state's genuine neutrality and non-alignment implies the lack of significant security cooperation with any of the great powers, and thus it receives support and assistance from none. In this respect, Niccolo Machiavelli once observed that

> the conqueror does not want you to be a doubtful friend who does not help him when he is in difficulties; the loser repudiates you because you were unwilling to go, arms in hand, and throw in your lot with him.[40]

All in all, the successful upholding of neutrality and non-alignment by small states is the exception rather than the rule. This foreign policy approach is not really a viable option for small states outside Western Europe.

Bandwagoning-balancing dichotomy

The mainstream IR theorists tend to offer two broad answers to the central question of small state-great power relations: small states are likely to bandwagon with or balance against identified threatening powers.[41] This section seeks to explain in more detail the two approaches. On one end of the spectrum, the conventional wisdom suggests that small states are more likely to bandwagon with threatening great powers than to balance against them. Walt argues that the weaker the state, the more likely it is to bandwagon due to the fact:

> Balancing may seem unwise because one's allies may not be able to provide assistance quickly enough. . . . States that are close to a country with large offensive capabilities may be forced to bandwagon because balancing alliances are simply not viable.[42]

There are two definitions of bandwagoning, namely bandwagoning against threats and for favours. Stephen Walt conceptualises bandwagoning based on the balance of threat, which is understood as the "alignment with the source of threat."[43]

Unfortunately, such a definition gives a misconception that bandwagoning is a form of alignment. For the sake of conceptual clarity, the author argues that what distinguishes bandwagoning from alignment is the existence of perceived threat, which is absent in the alignment between states. In other words, a small state's bandwagoning with a great power takes place if the small state perceives the great power as a threat and thus allies with the latter in order to minimise the security threat.

Walt also somehow complicates the concept by arguing that bandwagoning is essentially a form of appeasement.[44] Actually, bandwagoning and appeasement are different on two grounds: the level of threat and durability of the course of action. With regard to bandwagoning, the perception of threat must be limited and manageable. If the threat of the great power is overwhelming, the small state in question is most likely to either appease the threatening power or balance against it, for they are the only two options for the survival of the small state. Conventionally, appeasement is the satisfaction of the adversary's grievances through unilateral concessions, with the objectives of avoiding war. According to Ripsman and Levy, appeasement is a strategy adopted by threatened states in an attempt to "address a dangerous foe as a measure to buy time to build up their military power."[45] From this viewpoint, appeasement is seen as a temporary approach while bandwagoning is a relatively long-term course of action in that a small state allies with a threatening power, as long as the former does not feel the overwhelming threat to its very survival.

In examining Thailand's response to the rise of China, Ann Murphy further develops the concept of bandwagoning by providing two clear variables. She posits that, when a state is bandwagoning with threat, two variables must be present – perception of threat and attempts to conform to the interests of the threatening power.[46] The second definition of bandwagoning is based on economic considerations, which is understood as an attempt to ally with the winning side for favours. Kang defines bandwagoning as "clear attempts to curry favour with a state through military alliances or economic and diplomatic cooperation."[47] In this connection, Schweller claims that rising powers often offer incentives to small states and that positive sanctions are the most effective means to induce bandwagoning behaviour.[48] If economic dependence on a great power is high, balancing becomes both difficult and costly for small states. Miller finds supportive evidence in his study of Russia's small and weak neighbours: if a state that has a strong economic dependence on Russia attempts to pursue foreign policies that contradict the latter's preferences, the state may face economic hardship and the ruling political elite's chances of re-election will be adversely affected.[49]

Unlike the first definition that is based on the balance of threat, the weakness of the second definition of bandwagoning is its silence on political and security considerations. Thus, it provides a vague conceptual framework to analyse small states' behaviour towards great powers. As Roy argues, if economic gains are the primary drive for foreign policy behaviour, Southeast Asian countries are bandwagoning with China to some degree as the entire region recognises that China is an economic powerhouse and, therefore, every government prefers to avoid

the opportunity costs of antagonising Beijing if possible.[50] More importantly, although economic aid and trade are important, these factors are likely to be more modest ingredients in alignment politics. Having said that, the author is convinced that economic gain must be perceived as a factor in the equation, as national wealth is a prerequisite for a military and defence capability. It is also a factor contributing to the promotion of the ruling elite's legitimacy and thus political stability of the country. Therefore, one of the benefits of the bandwagoning behaviour is economic gain, which is crucial for the small state's ruling elite to address security challenges, externally and domestically. Therefore, this book argues that the bandwagoning behaviour of a small state towards a great power takes place if four variables are present: (1) a perception of threat from a great power must exist within the foreign policy establishment of the small state in question; (2) the threat must be limited and manageable; (3) the small state tends to tolerate the great power's pressure to conform to the latter's interests; and (4) the small state expects significant economic gains from its bandwagoning behaviour.

In the opposite end of the bandwagoning-balancing dichotomy, the dominant premise in the realist school of thought suggests that states tend to join alliances to protect themselves from other states or coalitions whose superior resources could pose a threat to the former. In other words, states balance against a perceived threatening state by cooperating with other states that fear the same potential adversary. Kenneth Waltz asserted that balancing against a rising power is a common practice. He claimed that "secondary states, if they are free to choose, flock to the weaker side" due to the fact that changes in the relative distribution of capabilities compel states to balance.[51] Robert Rothstein seems to agree with Waltz by stating that small states "attempt, insofar as it is within their means, to prevent the hegemony of any single great power in order to avoid the unpalatable alternatives which face any small power when the balance is out of equilibrium."[52]

Generally, the decision of small states on whether to adopt a balancing approach is influenced by a number of factors, including geographic proximity, threat assessment across issue areas, historical experiences, or cultural influences.[53] Georgia's foreign policy supports this argument. Due to the perception of overwhelming threat from Russia since the 2006 Rose Revolution, the country's foreign policy has been seen as an overt balancing strategy against its giant, immediate neighbour. Despite Russia's strong economic political and military pressure, noticeably the 2008 Georgia-Russia war, Georgia continues to exhibit balancing behaviour by constantly pursuing its Western integration and participation in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).[54] In the context of the rise of China, not a few IR scholars have anticipated that Asian countries would balance against the rising power on the basis that a rising China is threatening. Therefore, countries in Asia are expected to flock towards the US as the only balancer against China. For instance, Aaron Friedberg argues that the end of the Cold War ushered in an era of unstable multipolarity for Asia, in which power politics re-emerges and countries in the region are likely to rely on balancing as the primary measure to deal with emerging security threats, including those related to the rise of China.[55] Similarly, John Mearsheimer confidently wrote:

> China cannot rise peacefully. . . . Most of China's neighbours, including India, Japan, Singapore, South Korea, Russia and Vietnam, will likely join with the US to contain China's power.[56]

However, growing literature suggests that Southeast Asia is pursuing indirect or soft balancing strategies against China by relying on sustaining US dominance in the region in order to maintain the existing imbalance or preponderance of power in favour of the US, and at the same time building regional institutions that would constrain major powers through a mixture of international norms and regional style of interaction.[57] Whereas hard balancing implies the use of military build-ups and strong countervailing alliances to keep a problematic great power in check, soft balancing implies an ad hoc strategy of using multilateral institutions and loose diplomatic interactions in order to maintain a constructive relationship.[58]

By and large, balancing and bandwagoning options are framed primarily in terms of threats. They give small states several advantages. In the case of balancing, they increase the power and capability of small states to meet perceived threats via the security support and economic aid from great powers. In the case of bandwagoning, small states can deter and mitigate threats from the threatening power and at the same time obtain certain economic gains. However, a pure form of balancing or bandwagoning is a hardly desirable strategy for small states, especially in a situation where clearly imminent threats do not exist. It is because the bandwagoning-balancing dichotomy presents small states with a number of risks and challenges, which include dependency, the erosion of autonomy, possible abandonment, entrapment into great powers' conflicts, and the alienation of neighbouring countries and domestic forces. In this respect, Machiavelli vividly stated that

> a prince ought never to make common cause with one more powerful than himself to injure another, unless necessity forces him to it, as before said; for if he wins you rest in his power, and princes must avoid as much as possible being under the will and pleasures of others.[59]

Hedging strategy

In response to the weaknesses of the bandwagoning-balancing dichotomy as mentioned earlier, a growing number of IR scholars have questioned the relevance of the balancing-bandwagoning dichotomy in explaining foreign policy behaviour of small states towards great powers.[60] For instance, Amitav Acharya argues that the "balancing-bandwagoning dichotomy is too limited to capture the range of choices a state has in responding to a rising power"; and in the context of the rise of China, "Asian states' desire is not to choose between the US and China."[61] Consequently, there has been vigorous debate on hedging as a strategy, particularly among pundits of foreign policy and strategic studies in Asia. Jackson even argues that hedging – not balancing or bandwagoning – is the central tendency

of IR in Asia.[62] Originally used in banking and finance, hedging is defined as a "behaviour in which a country seeks to offset risks by pursuing multiple policy options that are intended to produce mutually counteracting effects, under the situation of high uncertainties and high stakes."[63] Evelyn Goh defines hedging as "a set of strategies aimed at avoiding (or planning for contingencies in) a situation in which states cannot decide upon more straightforward alternatives such as balancing, bandwagoning, or neutrality."[64]

It seems that hedging is a middle-path way in the balancing-bandwagoning dichotomy as it includes expandable variables. More precisely, hedging is a preliminary move towards either the bandwagoning or the balancing strategy without any serious security and political comment to a particular great power. Roy argues that hedging is actually a means to keep open "more than one strategic option against the possibility of a future security threat."[65] Kuik Cheng-Chwee concurs with this argument by vividly emphasising five hedging approaches that small states can take in their relations with a great power. Those approaches include (1) *economic pragmatism*, maximising economic gains from great powers, regardless of any political problems that might exist between them; (2) *binding-engagement*, socialising and integrating great powers into the established order in the region and neutralising their revisionist tendency through both bilateral and multilateral arrangements; (3) *limited bandwagoning*, forming only 'political partnerships' rather than political and military alliance and avoiding patron-client relations; (4) *dominance-denial strategy*, involving other powers in regional affairs and developing their own resilience and strengthening their collective diplomatic clout; and (5) *indirect balancing* against unspecific threats by forging defence cooperation and by upgrading its own military.[66]

In other words, hedging is an effort to "cultivate a middle position that forestalls or avoids having to choose one side at the obvious expense of another."[67] It is a way of avoiding a clear choice. In this regard, it is the extension of non-alignment where small states can enjoy the freedom to pick and choose the areas in which they can cooperate with different great powers and can play them off against one another. Against the backdrop of China's rise, Kurlantzick is of the view that most of the Southeast Asian nations have, at different degrees, taken a hedging approach for different purposes.[68] By a similar token, Roy argues that most of the Southeast Asian countries have pursued a hedging strategy by seeking favourable working relations with both China and the US, which might vie for a position of leadership in the region.[69] His research cases include Thailand's 'classic hedging strategy' of trying to simultaneously maintain good relations with both China for its economic interests and the US for its security and geo-strategic interests; hedging based on 'overt low-level balancing' of Singapore, the Philippines, and Vietnam; and the practice of hedging with highly restrained forms of balancing.[70] Generally, there are three reasons, according Jackson, why Asian countries tend to pursue a hedging approach, namely (1) a belief in power transition theory in the Asia-Pacific – unpredictable relations, possibly conflict between the current great power (the US) and the rising power (China); (2) mistrust of multilateral arrangements in the region which have been perceived as talk-shops, including ASEAN

and its multilateral frameworks with major powers; and (3) the complexity of the region's security architecture and increasing economic interdependence.[71]

The literature on hedging strategy is helpful in identifying an important behavioural trend of states, especially small ones, in dealing with threat from great powers. Empirically, the concept draws attention to the importance of risk aversion and predicaments of uncertainty that small states have to deal with in relation to great powers. The strength of the strategy can be summarised by a fascinating analogy by the first and the most respectful Foreign Minister of Singapore S Rajaratnam. He articulated a view:

> Like the sun the great powers will, by their very existence, radiate gravitational power. But if there are many suns then the smaller planets can, by judicious balancing of pulls and counter-pulls, enjoys a greater freedom of movement.[72]

However, hedging has some weaknesses. From the above definitions and elaboration of hedging, especially in the context of Southeast Asia vis-à-vis the rise of China, one can see the simplicity and the lack of nuance of the approach in understanding the foreign policy behaviour of small states towards a particular great power. Conceptually, a hedging strategy is not specific enough as it overlaps with many other strategic options, including balancing, bandwagoning, and regionalism. To put it more bluntly, it can be anything.

Alliance and alignment

The study of small state foreign policy focuses primarily on relations between small states and great powers and how small states address security risks and challenges in the relationships. As discussed earlier, the mainstream IR suggests that states, including weak powers, tend to align with or against foreign power(s) that poses the greatest threats. Such an observation fails to examine the geographical reality that great powers do not always pose imminent threats to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of small states. In many cases, the greatest threats to small states are their stronger and historically antagonistic neighbours. Cambodia and Laos between Thailand and Vietnam, Singapore between Indonesia and Malaysia are just a few examples to illustrate that small states harbour perceived fear of their immediate neighbours. Moreover, in many corners of the globe, regional institutions remain ineffective and unresponsive to the security needs of small states. Although globalisation and interdependence are the mainstream of international politics, economic, diplomatic, and military self-reliance remains one of the best ways that small states can ensure their survival. However, small states are not always in a position to withstand security challenges on their own footing. Therefore, seeking support from great power(s) remains an option. For instance, Singapore has historically been compelled to base its regional security strategy "principally on borrowing political and military strength from extra-regional powers."[73] Similarly, Thailand has had a history of engaging and harnessing the power of larger states in its national and regional security strategy, as seen in its

alliance with the US and subsequent alignment with China to deal with the Vietnamese threat in the 1970s and the 1980s.

During the Cold War, alliances were the outstanding feature of the international security landscape. They constituted a crucial factor in the calculation of foreign policymakers, including those in small states. Since the end of the Cold War, however, the geopolitical landscape has undergone remarkable transformation, accompanied by changes in the nature and forms of security cooperation. New security arrangements, including alignments, have emerged. Alliance and alignment are, more often than not, employed interchangeably. This is erroneous. Osgood and Badgley specify that alliance is a formal agreement that pledges states to cooperate in using their military resources against specific state(s) and usually obligates one or more of the signatories to use force or to consider the use of force in specified circumstances.[74] Similarly, Snyder defines alliances as "formal associations of states for the use (or non-use) of military force, in specified circumstances, against states outside their own membership."[75] An alliance can be "bilateral or multilateral groupings of states designed for defensive or military collaboration," such as bilateral alliances of the US 'hub and spoke' system in the Asia-Pacific (with Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines, and Thailand) or the NATO.[76]

Walt broadens the definition of alliance to cover both formal and informal security cooperation arrangements between two or more states with certain assumptions pertinent to "some level of commitment and an exchange of benefits for both parties."[77] As for mutual assistance, Snyder went further to argue that "an alliance agreement is essentially a joint declaration, a mutual promise to act in a specified way in future contingencies."[78] A good example of the informal form of alliance is the security cooperation arrangement between the US and Israel. Despite the fact that the two countries have never signed any defence treaty, their security cooperation carries a strong military commitment through a deep and institutionalised defence relationship and declared mutual assistance. In fact, the security commitment and the level of institutionalisation of the US-Israel defence relations are comparable to the US-UK alliance. Building on the existing literature, the author of this book defines alliance as security cooperation between states with a strong security commitment. Alliance can be formal if a defence treaty or a military pact is signed by concerning states. It can be informal if the security cooperation is cemented by implicit or explicit declaration of mutual military assistance and by high institutionalisation of defence cooperation through intelligence sharing, joint military operations, and foreign and defence policy coordination.

Generally, a traditional consensus among alliance theorists is that alliances are about capability aggregation formed to counterbalance against powerful states or perceived threatening adversaries.[79] However, since the early 1990s, according to Steward Woodman, there has been a "shift away from formal alliance structures based on military force to more transient marriages of convenience on specific issues."[80] The end of the Cold War also provoked a change in focus from specifically "threat-based" to "order-based" alliances.[81] NATO and alliances in Asia are good examples that suggest that instead of targeting a particular state, alliances

aim to promote peace, stability, and regional order. Within the backdrop of the changing balance of power in Asia, it is argued that Southeast Asian governments have generally steered away from traditional balance-of-power politics to the promotion of a more complex "balance of influence" comprising military, economic, institutional, and ideational dimensions.[82] Therefore, the contemporary security environment in the Asia-Pacific is not entirely characterised by alliances, but most of the time by multiple forms of alignment.

Alignment is an agreement of informal security cooperation that includes not only military but also a broad range of other areas of cooperation and collaboration. Snyder refers alignment to "a set of mutual expectations between two or more states that they will have each other's support in disputes or wars with particular other states."[83] Alignment is cemented not by legal and bureaucratic features but by a sense of shared interests, private commitments, and established cooperation through basing facilities, intelligence sharing, and policy coordination.[84] Ward indicates a broader concept of alignment in comparison with alliance as follows:

> Alignment is not signified by formal treaties, but is delineated by a variety of behavioural actions. It is a more extensive concept than alliance since it does not focus solely upon the military dimension of international politics. Degrees of alignments in political, economic, military and cultural spheres present a multifaceted sculpture of national and supranational postures.[85]

A sector-based definition of alignment is not helpful to distinguish the concept from alliance, for the latter also covers non-military cooperation. More importantly, the ultimate goal that a small state seeks to achieve from either alignment or alliance with great powers is to meet its security challenges and to ensure its survival. Broadly, one clear distinguishing feature that differentiates alignment from alliance is that alignment neither entails formal military arrangements through legal processes such as the signing and ratification of a defence treaty nor does it include explicit or implicit declaration of mutual military assistance between states. Moreover, security cooperation in an alignment does not include joint military operations. The institutionalisation of defence cooperation in an alignment is generally lower than that of alliance in terms of intelligence sharing and the coordination of diplomatic positions. However, the last feature is a grey area of overlapping meaning between a tight alignment and an alliance. This allows a tight alignment to develop into an alliance depending on the convergence of strategic interest as well as shared threat perception between states concerned.

Tight alignment versus loose alignment

A reality in international politics is that small states always encounter security dilemmas. In order to address security threats, small states might align with major power(s). Once the alignment is formed, small states run risks from the asymmetric partnership as they might have to compromise on their sovereign rights and foreign policy autonomy. Ciorciaria argues that the rewards of a great power

alignment include protection from international and external threats, as well as economic and political assistance, while the risks consist of the erosion of the weaker partner's independence, the alienation of other states and domestic actors, and the possible entrapment or abandonment.[86] Seeing these dilemmas, Stanley Hoffmann posits that "a small power, when it establishes a hierarchy of risks it must minimize, must choose between security and independence whenever it cannot simultaneously curtail the rights that threaten both."[87]

Ciorciaria attempts to conceptualise tight and limited alignments in his study of the foreign policy of Southeast Asian nations that, he argues, have adopted limited alignment with external great power(s). He defines limited alignment in comparison with tight alignment as a "lower commitment and less binding security relationship" that includes an arrangement for preferential arms sales, joint training exercise, and other forms of military aid, without a general pledge of military support in the event of a crisis or a general commitment to engage in joint combat operations.[88] By contrast, Ciorciaria refers to tight alignment as an arrangement involving at least two of the following features: (1) a formal defence treaty or widely acknowledged informal pact; (2) semi-permanent or permanent basing rights; and (3) a joint combat operation or significant alliance bureaucracy.[89] It means that no matter how close economic ties, political consultation, and military relationship between two states may be, as long as their relationship does not entail two of the three features stated here, they remain in a limited alignment. Although Ciorciaria's scholarship on limited alignment contributes to growing interests in the study of the dynamics of small states' alignment with the great powers, his conceptualisation lacks clarity and nuances, which unfortunately leads to a conceptual confusion. He is not able to differentiate tight alignment from the widely accepted definition of alliance as the three key attributes he uses to define tight alignment overlap with the key features of alliance. As a result, his attempt to conceptualise limited alignment is also flawed because he defines the term in relation to his conception of tight alignment.

The author agrees with Ciorciaria that a limited form of alignment is an autonomy-preserving strategy for small states that need to draw upon the support of and assistance from great powers. In this respect, the new concept of loose alignment is proposed with an attempt to modify Ciorciaria's flawed conception of limited alignment. A loose alignment can be differentiated from a tight alignment by three key characteristics. First, the level of foreign and defence policy coordination between a small state and a great power is relatively low, which can be comprehended by the limitation of bureaucratic and military institutionalisation and the absence of military or quasi-military bases in the small state. Second, the small state enjoys or/and attempts to exercise some degree of flexibility to defend its interests, especially when those interests are not compatible with those of the great power. In other words, the small state exerts resistance against the great power's pressure to conform to the latter's interests. Third, the small state's relations with the great power are tied up with other strategic options that the small state uses to address negative repercussions from the asymmetric relations and to create room to manoeuvre. To this end, the small state in question might be

actively engaged in inclusive regionalism, which enables it to constrain the great power's domination through the socialisation of regional norms and multilateral diplomacy. The small state might also diversify and cultivate its relations with other great powers to create strategic manoeuvrability in what Evelyn Goh calls "omni-enmeshment" policy.[90] Lee Kuan Yew acknowledged the importance of this strategy in his assertion:

> A small country has little power to alter the region, let alone the world. A small country must seek a maximum number of friends, while maintaining the freedom to be itself as a sovereign and independent nation.[91]

However, it is crucially important to note that having close relationships with many major powers at the same time does not guarantee their unwavering commitment to assist the threatened small state in question if those major powers do not have interest in so doing. In fact, the alignment preferences of small states are circumstantially determined.[92] Therefore, small states need to prioritise their alignments with great powers. By and large, small states' alignment options are influenced by the geographic proximity, threat assessment across issue areas, historical experiences, and their political, economic, and constitutional imperatives. The alignment choices also depend on the distribution of power in the region as well as the political, economic, and diplomatic weight of the great powers and their commitment to address the security concerns of the small states in question.

One might argue that this concept is indistinguishable from loose alignment as the latter also entails some hedging elements. The author argues that one difference is that hedging is a way of avoiding a clear choice, while a loose alignment represents a clear choice for the small state in question. This may be the primary choice or the most important strategic option compared to the other strategic options before the small state. Other options are secondary that can be carried out only if they do not seriously affect the primary option.

Conclusion

Small states are confronting complex security challenges. In addition to increasing non-traditional security issues, traditional security issues, including foreign military aggression, territorial conflict, and foreign interference, remain the primary concern of leaders in small states. To address those challenges, small states might adopt different strategic options, such as alliance, alignment, balancing, bandwagoning, hedging, neutrality and non-alignment, and regionalism. The option that small states select depends on the international and regional contexts, their own capacity, domestic context, and the judgement of leaders at a given point in time. Broadly, small states tend to seek support and assistance from great powers. However, the roles of the great powers can be conflicting for small states. On the one hand, the great powers may help small states with the needed resources and diplomatic support to enable the latter to safeguard their independence, sovereignty, and other security threats. On the other hand, the great powers may use

their influence and power to impose their will on small states, which could erode their independence and sovereignty – the very things they try to protect. Worst still, small states' alignment with the great powers might alienate other powers and thus invite the security threats that small states originally attempted to deal with. These are daunting security dilemmas that small states are facing.

Based on the definition of small states that the author has proposed in the earlier section, Cambodia can be considered as a small state for three reasons. First, it is a developing economy with a relatively small size population of around 15 million people. Second, in its foreign relations with immediate neighbours, except Laos, and with the rest of the world, Cambodia has always found itself on the weaker side in asymmetric relationships and has to confront more risks and vulnerabilities compared to the stronger parties. Finally, survival is the primary concern in its relations with the rest of the international community, particularly with its bigger and historically antagonistic neighbours – Thailand and Vietnam. A basic fact in the international system is that it presents hard choices for small states. Cambodia is no exception. Security dilemmas are always inherited in the Kingdom's foreign policy as explained in the long history of its search for security and survival in the following chapter. More importantly, as Cambodia used to be a victim of its geographical location of being squeezed by two bigger and historically antagonistic neighbours (Thailand and Vietnam) and a pawn of global realpolitik, a loose alignment with external powers, especially China, might be the best strategic option for the Kingdom. This is the preposition that this book will investigate.

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2 History of Cambodia's search for survival, 1431–1997

Henry Kissinger argues that "history is the memory of states," which bears heavily on future national decisions.[1] Therefore, in order to apprehend a state's current and future foreign policy, it is crucially important to understand the history of the state and its past strategic options, as well as the compelling factors determining those choices. The study of the long history of Cambodia's search for security and survival from 1431 to 1997 provides three important features of the country's foreign policy behaviour. First, Cambodian leaders had long been preoccupied with safeguarding and protecting their country's sovereignty and survival from their predatory neighbours – the Thai and later the Vietnamese. The collapse of the Khmer Empire in 1431 immediately put Cambodia under intermittent Thai suzerainty. In addition, the Vietnamese had continuously moved southwards since the early seventeenth century. By the late eighteenth century, the Vietnamese absorbed the entire Kingdom of Champa and took control of the Mekong Delta region of Cambodia. Immediately, the Khmer found themselves surrounded by two predatory neighbours. The end result was that the Thai and the Vietnamese continued to swallow Cambodian territory and exert their dominant influence over this small and vulnerable Kingdom until the arrival of the French. Cambodia's perception of threats towards Thailand and Vietnam continued to be the most compelling and inexorable factor shaping the Kingdom's foreign policy, especially after this small state regained its independence in 1953.

Second, seeking support and assistance from external great powers against the Thai and the Vietnamese had been the underlying diplomatic tradition of Khmer strategists. In fact, Khmer Kings started to look for help from European powers against the Thai since the late sixteenth century, without a positive result. In 1863, the Khmer accepted an undesired but necessary fate as a French protectorate in order to ensure their territorial integrity and to escape from their neighbours' suzerainty. It is widely agreed that without the arrival of the French, Cambodia as a state would have been completely swallowed by its predatory neighbours. Consequently, Norodom Sihanouk's proclaimed policy of neutrality and non-alignment after Cambodia obtained its independence in 1953 was a delicate balancing act with an attempt to use the opposing powers in the Cold War, especially China and the US, to safeguard his country's territorial integrity and independence from Cambodia's neighbours. However, as Sihanouk saw the

declining influence of the US and thus changing balance of power in Indochina in favour of Hanoi, he established an alignment with the PRC. During Cambodia's turbulent times following the 1970 coup that overthrew Sihanouk, the Khmer Republic (1970–1975, KR) and Democratic Kampuchea (1975–1979, DK) opted for the creation of alliances with external powers, the US and China respectively, in order to ensure their regime survival and neutralise the threats from Cambodia's neighbours.

Third, as a small state, Cambodia always experienced a security dilemma as its effort to ensure the survival came with a high price, from the loss of territories and sovereignty, the erosion of autonomy, and isolation from the international community to civil war, and some of the worst atrocities of the twentieth century. This chapter, therefore, seeks to provide a historical sketch of Cambodia with an emphasis on four important questions related to the country's search for security and survival: (1) What was the role of Cambodia's predatory neighbours in the collapse of the Angkor Empire? (2) What were the security implications of the demise of the Empire on Cambodia? (3) How had Cambodia addressed the security challenges over the seven centuries that followed the fall of Angkor? (4) What was China's role in Cambodia's strategic options?

The rise and fall of the Khmer Empire

Cambodia is what remains of the once splendid Angkor or Khmer Empire. At its zenith from the eleventh to the twelfth centuries, Khmer Kings ruled a vast area of Southeast Asia, which is today occupied parts of Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, and the northern portion of the Malay Peninsula.[2] Unfortunately, the glory of the Khmer Empire came to an end after the Siamese (today's Thai) invaded and destroyed the city of Angkor in 1431. This marked the starting point of Cambodia's persistent quest for the survival, rather than the revival, of its past glory. Cambodia's roots can be traced back to Funan or the "Kingdom of Mountain," which was founded in the first century AD. It is believed that Funan controlled a large territory of "the lower valleys of the Mekong River, the area around the Tonle Sap Lake, and a part of the Mekong delta region" and imposed its suzerainty over smaller states in the northern portion of the Malay Peninsula.[3] In the sixth century, however, Funan was absorbed by another emerging Khmer state of Chenla, which during the next three centuries controlled a vast area in today's "central and upper Laos, western Cambodian and southern Thailand."[4] Chenla suffered from dissensions within the royal family, which resulted in the split of the Kingdom into Chenla-of-the-land and Chenla-of-the-water in the eighth century.[5] Over the next hundred years, Chenla-of-the-water was further weakened by dynastic rivalries, which enabled the Javanese – who launched a number of raids on the east coast of Indochina between 767 and 787 – to successfully impose suzerainty over the Khmer.[6]

Javanese suzerainty was cast off after the ascension of Jayavarman II (802–850) to the throne of Chenla-of-the-water. Subsequently, Jayavarman reunified the Khmer kingdoms and moved the capital to Siem Reap, from where he built the Angkor Empire. During his reign, Jayavarman firmly established the concept

of a unified, independent Khmer state ruled by a *devaraja* or God-king.[7] A sophisticated irrigation system was built to provide the economic foundation for the Empire. Monumental temples around the site of the capital at Angkor were also built. The Khmer Empire reached its apogee in the eleventh century under the rule of Suryavarman II (ca. 1112–1150), who exercised vigorous administrative policies through the mobilisation of people to build his city, and expanded the territory and manpower under his control by waging successful wars against the Chams, the Vietnamese, and the peoples living along the present Thailand-Myanmar border.[8] Suryavarman built the great temple complex of Angkor Wat, which was finished at about the time of his death in 1150.[9] The temple became and remains to be the largest religious building in the world and the greatest single work of architecture in Southeast Asia.

Externally, Suryavarman II extended his Empire's domain by a series of successful wars against neighbouring kingdoms. He campaigned to the east against the Vietnamese and the Chams by "using mercenaries drawn primarily from tributary areas to the west and used the Chams in expeditions against Vietnam."[10] Noticeably, at the beginning of the twelfth century, Suryavarman established diplomatic relations with China, the first Khmer King to do so.[11] Thereafter, Khmer Kings maintained close relations with China. According to Chinese records, 21 diplomatic missions were sent from the Khmer Empire to the Chinese Ming court between 1371 and 1432.[12] David Chandler concludes that "some of these missions may have been purely ceremonial, they must have come primarily to trade, to arrange for trade and perhaps also to request Chinese support against the depredation of the Thai."[13] However, there is no source that explains why the Chinese did not come to assist the Khmer Kings against Thai attacks. Perhaps, it was due to the internal contestation of power between Confucian scholars and the court eunuchs and the preoccupation of the Chinese with the renewed Mongol attacks.[14] These were also the reasons why the Ming court-sponsored expeditionary mission was cancelled after Admiral Zheng, who died in 1433, because Zheng himself was a eunuch and the money was needed for defence against the Mongols.

Suryavarman's death triggered conflicts between "rival aspirants to the throne" over the next 30 years.[15] The political turmoil presented a golden opportunity for Champa to revenge against the Khmer. Angkor was attacked and captured in 1178 by the Chams.[16] However, the invaders were finally pushed back and were defeated by the armies of Jayavarman VII (1181–1218). After the victory, Jayavarman II ruled the Angkor Empire to reach its greatest extent, but it also experienced its last years of glory. Jayavarman's feats in war and temple construction possibly brought the Empire into decline, as tremendous expenditure of money, energy, and labour by the people was needed.[17] As a result, the people's morale collapsed and the Empire's economic and military power diminished. Moreover, its decline was accelerated by the growing power of the Thai, who had been slowly migrating from Yunan into the Indochinese Peninsula for several hundred years.[18] In the late thirteenth century, after the establishment of their first state – Sukhothai – the Thai started to replace "Khmer authority in the Menam Basin and along the upper Mekong River."[19] Continuous attacks by the Thai in the

fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, which led to the sack of Angkor in 1431, marked the fall of the Khmer Empire.[20] The city was later abandoned, perhaps due to its proximity to Ayutthaya – Sukhothai's successor. It is believed that after the Thai invasion of Angkor in 1431, people, ideas, texts, and institutions migrated west from Angkor to Ayutthaya, which partially helped the Thai further grow in strength at the expanse of the Khmer.[21]

From a political-economic perspective, Vickery argued that Angkor was abandoned due to the increasing importance of maritime trade, especially with China, to the Khmer state. As foreign trade became a new source of wealth and power, a new centre, Phnom Penh, on the lower Mekong River area was favoured.[22] As a result, population would shift down south, and thus the political strength of the new centre had increased. Finally, the new centre would "either seize power, or the old government would shift its capital."[23] There are other explanations pertaining to the collapse of the Angkor Empire. One of those is the change of the Kingdom's religions from Hinduism to Theravada Buddhism. It is argued that Theravada Buddhism, introduced to the Khmer in the thirteenth century, was in some ways subversive of Angkor cohesion. Traditionally, Khmer Kings were thought to "enjoy a special relationship with a particular deity – usually Siva, more rarely Vishnu, and occasionally the composite of both known as Harihara."[24] The relationship served as a source of their power and authority. Generally, Khmer Hindu Kings ruled as *devaraja* by an "aggregation of statements – rituals, temples, poems, marriages, inscriptions, and the like – that displayed his grandeur, acumen, and godliness."[25] By contrast, Buddhist Kings engaged less with those practices. They ruled by their compassion, merit making, and care towards their subjects. This made the Buddhist Kings less magnificent and thus less authoritative. Moreover, Theravada Buddhism taught people to seek self-enlightenment and abandon worldly things and discouraged any belief in superstition. In this sense, the sovereignty of the *devaraja* was basically challenged and their authority and legitimacy diminished.

Recently, a stronger effort has been made to include the diseases and biological factors that impacted upon the Angkor Empire into the narrative. Some scholars identified climate change as a factor in the eventual end of the Empire. In 2012, a more definitive study of the impact of climate change, particularly drought, in Southeast Asia during the Angkor era was carried out and concluded that there was a certain linkage between climatic factors and the collapse of the Angkor Empire.[26] Similarly, another study suggested that as it was impossible to maintain irrigation works at Angkor, the water became stagnant, turning it into "a breeding place for malarial mosquitoes, further depleting the population in a spiralling process."[27] Whatever the reasons, the collapse of Angkor ushered Cambodia into the next four centuries of decline and domination by its neighbouring countries. Roger Smith asserted that from the fall of Angkor in 1431 to the establishment of the French protectorate in 1863, the "history of Cambodia is largely an account of internal strife and of the efforts of Khmer Kings to stave off subjugation by Siam and Vietnam."[28] Clearly, the collapse of Angkor had downgraded the Khmer state from an empire to a small state, whose survival had been an ultimate goal for generations of the Cambodians.

Cambodia and its bigger neighbours: an antagonistic history

Cambodia was immediately dominated by the Thai following the collapse of Angkor. Khmer Kings' efforts to relinquish Thai suzerainty were not successful. From the fifteenth to the seventeenth century, Cambodia's strategic manoeuvrability was limited due to the absence of a countervailing power against the Thai. The Khmer were able to cast off Thai yoke only because of Ayutthaya's preoccupation with Burmese military threats. By the late eighteenth century, the Vietnamese emerged as a regional power. The competition between the Thai and the Vietnamese in Cambodia was inevitable and presented an opportunity for Khmer Kings to retain, at least temporarily, their independence by adopting a strategy of playing one rival against the other. However, a small state like Cambodia had to pay a price for adopting this strategy. First, Cambodia was effectively trapped between two powerful competing neighbours, which generated profound effects on Cambodia's domestic power struggle. Chandler notices:

> A side effect of the advent of Vietnamese power was that the Cambodian royal family and its elite supporters were now liable to spilt along the pro-Thai and pro-Vietnamese lines. . . . Depending on which power supported an incumbent, his rivals would seek support from the other to overthrow him.[29]

Second, with their intention to drive out Thai domination, Khmer Kings risked their country's security and survival to another predatory power – the Vietnamese. In fact, 21 provinces of Cambodia were completely annexed to Vietnam, and the Kingdom as a whole almost became a province of the Vietnamese due to the Vietnamisation of Cambodia in the nineteenth century.

The fall of Angkor and the rise of Ayutthaya as a regional power meant that the Thai domination over the Khmer was almost inevitable. In fact, Thai suzerainty in Cambodia started immediately after the capture of Angkor in 1431, as the city was directly ruled by the son of the Ayutthaya King – Nagar Indra.[30] The Khmer's resistance against Thai dominance took place from time to time. For instance, King Ang Chan (1516–1566) and his son, Barom Reachea I (1566–1576), successfully repelled Thai attacks and inflicted severe losses on the Thai.[31] The efforts succeeded mainly due to Ayutthaya's preoccupation with Burmese attacks, as during the sixteenth century the Thai suffered three different invasions by the Burmese, in one of which the Thai capital of Ayutthaya was destroyed in 1569 and captured for the next 15 years.[32] The Khmer took advantage of Thai efforts against the Burmese to recapture some provinces in the northwest. However, the Khmer's attempt to permanently relinquish Thai hegemony was unsuccessful due to the imbalance of military forces and the absence of a countervailing power against the Thai. As mentioned earlier, the Ming court adopted an inward foreign policy due to domestic political crisis between Confucian scholars and the eunuchs and Mongol military threats. The Vietnamese were weak, as they had just cast off Chinese rule in 1428, but remained in the Chinese tributary system.[33] Interestingly, the Khmer, the Lao, and, to a lesser extent, the Burmese were facing the

same security threats from the Thai. From a balancing strategy perspective, the threatened states would join force against the common enemy. However, there is no evidence to suggest as to why Khmer Kings did not forge alliances of some sort with other kingdoms, especially the Lao and the Burmese, who considered the Thai as a common threat. It was probably because Khmer Kings believed that alliance was an unhelpful notion in external relations at that time as all kingdoms were predatory, waiting for opportunity to expand their territory and power.

The Khmer also looked for help from Western powers. Initially, Khmer Kings allowed Catholic missionaries to "preach and send gifts of rice to the recently colonized centres of Malacca and Manila in exchange for promises of military help," which never arrived.[34] Noticeably, as the Thai prepared for a new campaign in 1593 against Lovek – the new Khmer capital on the shores of the Tonle Sap – King Ang Chan appealed to the Spanish governor general of the Philippines for help, "even promising to convert to Christianity" if sufficient assistance would be given.[35] But the help never came. After having recovered Ayutthaya, the Thai seized Lovek in 1594, which was the turning point in Cambodian history, ushering in centuries of weakness and intermittent Thai hegemony as it was followed by a decade of civil strife.[36] In 1603, Barom Reachea IV was installed in Phnom Penh, and the Khmer Kingdom became a vassal state of the Thai.[37]

Cambodia's balancing game against powerful neighbours

The Khmer quest for autonomy from the Thai continued unabated. In the early eighteenth century, Khmer Kings saw the presence of the ascendant Vietnamese dynasty of Nguyen in the Mekong Delta as an opportunity to offset Thai suzerainty in Cambodia. However, Cambodia's balancing game against its powerful neighbours yielded limited results in securing the Kingdom's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Cambodia's history illustrates that the country's survival was possible because of two main factors. First, the two neighbours' campaigns against Cambodia were distracted by their own predicaments, such as external military threats, dynastic conflicts, and revolts. Second, the Khmer resistance against their neighbours' imposition of suzerainty tended to be effective when the competition between aspirants to the Cambodian throne was less contentious, which meant that the external powers could not manipulate internal factors in Cambodia for their domination. In fact, the history of Cambodia in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was a repetition of the situation where invasions and domination from the Thai and the Vietnamese were usually preceded by civil wars.

Since the early seventeenth century, the Vietnamese had continuously moved southwards. The Nguyen warlords gradually absorbed the Kingdom of Champa and eventually annexed the entire kingdom by the late eighteenth century.[38] The Vietnamese continued their southwards movement to take control of the Mekong Delta region of Cambodia, including the trading centre of Prey Nakor (Saigon). Smith argued that the Vietnamese settlement was partly supported by Khmer Kings, who saw the presence of the Vietnamese as "a means to cast off the Thai influence and control."[39] The Khmer, however, had to pay a price for losing the

territory almost permanently to the Vietnamese. By the end of the eighteenth century, the Vietnamese had absorbed "all of lower delta region and organized it along Vietnamese administrative lines."[40] From there, they attempted to exercise suzerainty further over Cambodia. However, this attempt never succeeded because of dynastic struggles among the Nguyen kings, the Tay Son revolts, and wars with the Trinh of Tongkin, as well as a strong Thai dominance over Cambodia.[41]

The Thai and the Vietnamese had different interests in Cambodia. According to Chandler, the Thai rulers wanted to "extend their prestige along their frontiers and to amplify their self-image as universally accepted kings" or *chakravartin*.[42] These ambitions led Thai rulers to expand their land and people under their control, including Cambodia. For the Thai, the Khmer were "fellow Buddhist children basking in a fund of *chakri* merit who could provide cardamom for the court and manpower for *chakri* wars."[43] As for the Vietnamese, Cambodia could be served as "a fence, a buffer state, and a dumping ground for colonists."[44] As the Thai and Vietnamese continued to expand their influence and territory, it was just a matter of time before Cambodia would become a battleground between its two predatory neighbours. After crowning as the emperor of unified Vietnam in 1802, Gia Long began to confront the Thai in Cambodia.[45] In response to the demonstration of Thai suzerainty by the enthronement of Ang Chan II (1806–1834), Gia Long demanded recognition from the new Khmer King of Vietnamese dominance in Cambodia as well.[46] Ang Chan II complied with the demand, primarily because he felt that the Vietnamese would be a countervailing force to Thai suzerainty in Cambodia. Chandler notes that Ang Chan's alignment with Vietnam was to "deflect some pressures" from the Thai and to create the equilibrium of influence of the two predatory neighbours in Cambodia which would provide him "more bargaining power with his patrons."[47] However, Ang Chan's close ties with the Vietnamese upset not only the Thai but also some of his own elites, especially those in the northwest provinces. As a result, a conflict between Thai and Vietnamese "expeditionary forces inside Cambodia" took place in 1811–1812, in which the Thai supported Ang Chan's rivals, while Chan appealed for support from Gia Long.[48] As the conflict reached a stalemate, the Thai were forced to recognise the Vietnamese's dominant position in Cambodia in order to avert another conflict while still engaged in a war with Burma.[49] During the next two decades, growing discontent among the people – fanned by severe economic depression and harsh Vietnamese control – triggered several revolts.[50] In response, the Thai campaigned to recover their domination over Cambodia after realising the extent of Khmer discontent against the Vietnamese. More importantly, the British defeat of Burma in 1825–1826 removed Burmese threat from Siam's western frontier.[51] In 1833, taking advantage of Vietnamese preoccupation with a revolt in Cochinchina, Siam launched an attack across Cambodia into Cochinchina but failed to accomplish its end as heavy Vietnamese resistance compelled a retreat.[52]

After the death of Ang Chan in 1834, Vietnam appointed his daughter, Ang Mey, as figurehead queen and undertook intensive efforts to "Vietnamise" Cambodia, where Cambodian officials were forced to adopt Vietnamese names, customs, and dress; Theravada Buddhist monks were driven from the temples; and

Phnom Penh was changed to a Vietnamese name – Nam Vang.[53] In 1840, the Cambodian administrative apparatus was forcibly moved to Saigon, where the "compilation of a census and registration of land-holdings" began.[54] When foreigners carried out traditionally unpopular public practices, including land registration and taxation, revolts across Cambodia were incited. Innumerable bands of guerrillas attacked and massacred Vietnamese wherever they were found. Representatives of the Cambodian nobility sought Thai assistance in casting off Vietnamese control and establishing Ang Chan's brother, Ang Duong, as the "rightful king of Cambodia."[55] Subsequently, the Thai and Vietnamese armies fought each other again on Cambodian soil for the six years.[56] A peace settlement between these two regional powers was finally reached in 1846. In the following year, Ang Duong was crowned by the representatives of both the Siamese and the Vietnamese courts. In almost two decades that followed, Ang Duong preserved for his Kingdom "only a semblance of independent existence" as he sent tribute to both patrons.[57]

Cambodia under French protectorate

Because it is sandwiched between two predatory neighbouring powers, most historians conclude that Cambodia would have disappeared if it had not negotiated a treaty with France in 1863 to keep its neighbours at bay.[58] The downside of Cambodia's acceptance of French protectorate, however, was the loss of its independence and sovereign rights for almost a century. With the movement for independence, the Cambodians resisted French rule from time to time, more noticeably at the beginning of the twentieth century. Paradoxically, Cambodian movements for independence introduced to the Kingdom a polarisation between three main political groups – the Khmer Issarak, the pro-Vietnamese independence movement (Viet Minh) group, and the royal ruling elite. Due to different goals and approaches towards independence as well as their link with external powers, especially with Thailand and the Viet Minh, Cambodia could have been torn apart. This concern became more acute for Cambodian leaders, particularly King Sihanouk, due to a sense of hatred and suspicion among the Khmer towards their historically antagonistic neighbours. At some points, Sihanouk preferred the presence of the French to an independent but vulnerable Cambodia.

French rule: undesired option for Cambodia's survival

The enthronement of Ang Duong in 1848 marked a turning point in Cambodia's search for survival, as the new King was relatively cautious after living many years in Bangkok. According to Chandler, Ang Duong's relations with Thai Kings – both Rama III (King Nangklao) and Rama IV (King Mongkut) – were "dutiful and subservient."[59] Moreover, unlike his brother who allied with the Vietnamese to gain some freedom of manoeuvre against the Thai, Ang Duong made no attempt to improve his relationship with the Vietnamese, partly because he was frightened by the Vietnamisation in Cambodia during the 1830s. More importantly, as Ang

Duong considered the stalemate between the Thai and the Vietnamese as only a temporary relief for Cambodia, seeking the protection of an external great power was his inevitable choice.[60] In this regard, Ang Duong chose France because it had already succeeded in making its influence felt on the Indochinese Peninsula. Cambodia had almost no alternative at that time. The Spanish and Dutch were remote. Besides France, the only other European power that exerted strong influence over mainland Southeast Asia was Britain. However, due to strong British-Siamese ties, especially their military alliance leading to the first Anglo-Burmese War in 1824–25, seeking the protection from the British was not and could not be a choice for Cambodia. In fact, the friendship with Britain had been the cornerstone of Thai foreign policy until the rise of Japan in the late 1930s.[61] Meanwhile, the Qing court of China was in decline due to anti-dynastic rebellions and, particularly, the expansionism of the European powers. The first Opium War of 1839–1842, followed by the lease of Hong Kong to Britain in 1842, ushered the Chinese into a century of humiliation.[62]

In 1853, Ang Duong sent an official note to Napoleon III, "asking for his protection and assistance in regaining the lost provinces in the Mekong delta."[63] Napoleon responded positively. However, due to the lack of understanding of Cambodia's relations with Siam, the French envoy, Charles de Montigny, "imprudently exposed to the Thai a French plan to enter into negotiation with Cambodia" during a stopover in Bangkok in 1856, which prompted the Thai to threaten "Ang Duong with war if he signed the treaty with France."[64] Such a threat forced Ang Duong not to receive the French envoy. In 1857, France attacked Vietnam for the first time, following the "persecution of French Jesuit missionaries and revocation of economic privileges."[65] Taking this opportunity, Ang Duong provoked Vietnam into war with Cambodia to create a "pretext to request aid from both Siam and France in obtaining the retrocession of the Mekong delta provinces."[66] Unfortunately, Ang Duong died in 1859 without realising his aspiration to regain the provinces. His desire to seek external power's protection was further carried out by his son and successor, King Norodom, who accepted the French protectorate in 1863 in return for the French assurance of protection against the Thai and internal revolts led by his throne-aspiring brother, Sivotha.[67] The French interest in Cambodia was explained by the country's geographical situation that could serve as a buffer against "any future attempts of the Thai and the British to extend their influence into the rich coastal areas" of Vietnam.[68]

After successfully persuading Siam to relinquish its suzerainty over Cambodia through the demonstration of strength, France emerged as the sole dominant power in Cambodia. It thus began to tighten its control of the country. In 1884, when Norodom refused to participate in a customs union with French-controlled Vietnam, the governor general of Cochina, Charles Thomson, reasserted French dominance by resorting to gunboat diplomacy. As Thomson arrived in Phnom Penh with a contingent of French troops and several gunboats placed around the royal palace, King Norodom was forced to sign the convention that turned Cambodia into a virtual colony of France.[69] Smith asserted that "all that distinguished the protectorate from a colony was the monarchy, which was still nominally the

highest authority," as the King was left with only the right to enact the "administrative, judicial, and commercial reforms."[70] The King's power was further diminished by the establishment of a council of ministers, which functioned under the presidency of the representative of France – the *Résident supérieur* – to manage the country.[71] In order to further strengthen their authority in Cambodia, the French controlled the succession to the throne.[72] When Norodom died in 1904, the French ignored his wishes and instead appointed his brother – Sisowath – as monarch thanks to Sisowath's loyalty and assistance in crushing several revolts against French rule. After Sisowath died, his son, Monivong, was crowned in 1927. However, when King Monivong died in 1941, the French did not crown his son, Monireth, who appeared to be too "independence-minded."[73] Instead, the French placed young Norodom Sihanouk, a nephew of Prince Monireth, to the throne. Because of his youth and lack of experience, Sihanouk was believed to be easily manipulated.

Cambodia's dilemmas over the quest for independence

Although the presence of France in Indochina ensured the survival of Cambodia as a nation, the Khmer had lived in the long period that Langlois described as "exploitative, and negligent and often rapacious."[74] Therefore, Cambodian rebellions against the French protectorate took place occasionally, noticeably revolts led by the Buddhist monks Achar Sva (1864–1866) and Pou Kompo (1865–1867) and by Prince Si Votha (1867–1877).[75] Prior to the Second World War, the rise of nationalism and decolonisation across the globe gave impetus to Cambodian movements for independence. However, Sihanouk's quest for independence was pragmatic and cautious, primarily due to his primary concern that, in the aftermath of French withdrawal from Indochina, Cambodia would confront a myriad of challenges, especially security threats from his neighbouring countries. This concern was amplified by the links that different Cambodian independence movements had with Thailand and Vietnam.

The late 1930s witnessed the first organised nationalist movement in Cambodia. A campaign to elevate the people above their differences in a nationalist movement towards greater autonomy under the French protectorate was launched. Son Ngoc Thanh, a journalist, and Pach Chhoeun, a teacher of Pali at the Buddhist Institute, founded *Nagaravatta* – a journal to be used as a propaganda tool for the nationalist movement.[76] The French were always on full alert on the movement. In mid-1942, Pach Chhoeun was arrested while Son Ngoc Thanh escaped to Japan.[77] In March 1945, the nationalist movement gained more impetus due to the takeover of the colonial administration by the Japanese, who had close relations and contacts with Son Ngoc Thanh and Pach Chhoeun. In late 1945, however, French administrators returned to Cambodia after the defeat of the Japanese in the Second World War.[78] Son Ngoc Thanh was arrested and exiled to France.[79] The French proposed a "diarchy leading to eventual independence" and the establishment of a joint Franco-Cambodian commission to draft a constitution for a self-ruled Cambodia, which subsequently became an "autonomous state within the French Union."[80]

Despite declining momentum, Cambodian independence movements against French rule remained active. Basically, there were three independence movements with different approaches. The first group, headed by Son Ngoc Thanh, consisted of those who were convinced that only force would win independence. Following Thanh's arrest, many of his followers fled to the Thai-held Cambodian territory in the north, where they formed armed bands called the Khmer Issarak or Free Cambodians.[81] Some went to Bangkok, where they gained the support of Thai Prime Minister Pridi Phanomyong. Pridi's support for the Khmer Issarak was a response to the re-establishment of French influence in Cambodia. The return of the French meant that Thailand would return to Cambodia the provinces of Siam Reap and Battambang obtained by Thailand under the Tokyo Treaty, which was signed in the aftermath of the Franco-Siamese War of 1941.[82] In fact, the Thai still believed that those provinces were their lost territories based on their pervious suzerainty that were forced to concede to the Khmer during the French protectorate (see Chapter 4 for more detail). For this reason, Phanomyong supported the Khmer Issarak and agreed to host its government-in-exile in Bangkok. The second movement against French rule was the pro-Viet Minh group. Son Ngoc Minh, who accepted assistance and support from the Viet Minh, headed this group.[83] While the Khmer Issaraks were gaining control along the western and northern borders, the pro-Viet Minh group infiltrated the southern provinces, where they organised a Khmer People's Liberation Army and were believed to receive "orders from the South Vietnam Resistance Executive Committee."[84]

Interestingly, King Sihanouk favoured the return of France and a slow evolution towards independence. He believed that Cambodia was ill-prepared to cope with the numerous political and economic problems that would confront a newly independent nation. Therefore, while independence from France was the ultimate goal, Sihanouk was convinced that the process had to be "gradual and carefully planned."[85] He also believed that until Cambodia could become self-sufficient, a "friendly France would be amenable to lending economic and technological assistance."[86] Sihanouk's approach reflected his concern that "armed struggle against the French could work to the advantage of the Viet Minh, whose success might result in a return to Vietnamese domination."[87] He also anticipated the worst-case scenario that a sudden withdrawal of French troops from Cambodia would invite Thai and Vietnamese incursions.[88] Within such polarising political dynamics, King Sihanouk took the initiative by proposing a series of reforms to reconcile these competing interests of different political groups as well as integrate those groups into a political process towards eventual independence. One of the reforms was the holding of an election to choose members of the Constitutive Assembly, which took place in September 1946.[89] The pro-Thanh Democratic Party led by Prince Sisowath Youtevong overwhelmingly won the election and created Cambodia's first constitution in July 1947. It continued to obtain a comfortable majority victory in the National Assembly elections in December 1947.[90] Although the Democratic Party was by far the most popular, its support for Son Ngoc Thanh and the Khmer Issarak movement brought the party into conflict with King Sihanouk and the French. Eventually, in September 1949, Sihanouk

dissolved the Assembly, which was followed by six Cabinet reshuffles during the two-year period in the aftermath of the Assembly's dissolution.[91]

In the late 1940s, the intensification of the Viet Minh war against France spread turmoil in Cambodia. The French recruited the Cambodians to "fight against the Viet Minh," while the Viet Minh had "encouraged anti-French nationalist sentiment among the Khmer" against the colonial rule.[92] In this context, the rural-based, pro-Viet Minh group led by Son Ngoc Minh emerged to conduct a guerrilla war against both the French and Sihanouk.[93] With the growing influence of the pro-Viet Minh group, the urban-based Issaraks led by Son Ngoc Thanh, Dap Chuon, and Prince Norodom Chantaraingsey began to be concerned about Viet Minh activities.[94] The Democratic Party was further divided "between those who wished to preserve the monarchy and those who supported Thanh and republican system," as the latter questioned Sihanouk's patriotism and his "gradualist approach" towards independence.[95] In order to prevent his country from pulling apart in a left-right political competition and to maintain his authority, King Sihanouk embarked on his "Royal Crusade for Independence" in February 1953.[96] He visited Western capitals pressing his demands for Cambodia's independence, which were initially rejected by the French. Due to increasing military resistance in Vietnam and Laos and a concern about the possible drift away from the conservative monarchists to the Viet Minh–associated leftists in Cambodia, the French eventually made concessions, which resulted in the declaration of Cambodia's independence on 9 November 1953.[97]

Sihanouk's foreign policy choices

A newly independent Cambodia emerged in the context of the Cold War as well as the Vietnam War at its doorstep. Economically poor, militarily weak, and vulnerable, Cambodian leaders initially sought the assistance and protection from the West, particularly the US. Cambodian membership in a regional defence system was also a desirable option of King Sihanouk, who saw the Viet Minh and its affiliated group in Cambodia as the greatest security threats to Cambodia's survival. However, Sihanouk failed to secure an American security commitment for Cambodia. Moreover, the Cambodian membership in the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) was also rejected. Sihanouk's pro-West foreign policy was impossible due to a consensus among the great powers at the 1954 Geneva Conference on the neutralisation of the Indochinese states.

As the Vietnam War and leftist-rightist power struggle in Cambodia increasingly intensified, Sihanouk saw a need to strike a balance between the communist and capitalist blocs, especially between China and the US. As a result, he adopted the foreign policy of neutrality. However, Cambodia's neutrality could not be maintained due to three main factors: (1) the spill over of the Vietnam War into Cambodia; (2) Sihanouk's anticipation of the US disengagement from Indochina; and (3) his perception of the increasingly important role of China in checking Vietnam's ambitions in relation to Cambodia. By the early 1960s, Sihanouk seemed to deviate from neutrality when he tilted towards Beijing. However, Sihanouk had to

pay a big price – the 1970 coup against his regime – for the change of Cambodia's foreign policy direction away from neutrality and non-alignment.

The 1954 Geneva Conference and Cambodia's foreign policy objectives

A genuine fear over the predatory ambitions of powerful neighbours had always existed among Cambodian leaders. It was clearly manifested during the Geneva Conference on Indochina, which was convened in May 1954, with representatives from the US, France, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, the PRC, Cambodia, Laos, the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam), and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV, North Vietnam). The Cambodian delegation to the conference wanted to achieve one crucially important goal, which was the recognition and protection of Cambodia's sovereignty and territorial integrity by the great powers, particularly the US. According to Leifer, King Sihanouk was convinced that the Viet Minh would soon take control of a unified Vietnam and then would focus "their efforts on the subjugation of Cambodia and Laos."[98] In Sihanouk's calculus, in order to cope with the Viet Minh threat, there seemed almost no alternative to the American commitment to Cambodia's security due to his belief that Cambodia's former colonial master, France, was neither willing nor able to provide security protection for Cambodia.[99] Moreover, renewed military ties with France would definitely have negative internal repercussions as they would provide a pretext for the Democrats and the Khmer Issaraks to attack the King for colluding with the former colonial power.[100]

Consequently, Cambodia sought an agreement on "automatic American assistance" in the event of military aggression against the Kingdom.[101] However, the US turned away from specific commitments because it did not want any deployment of its military forces in mainland Southeast Asia.[102] Cambodia then attempted to secure its membership in the Southeast Asia regional defence system that the US was about to organise. This desire was clearly understood in the context of Cambodia's strong refusal to accept the DRV demand for the neutralisation of Cambodia.[103] The Cambodian delegation insisted:

> The Royal Government of Cambodia will not join in any agreement with other states if this agreement carries for Cambodia the obligation to enter into a military alliance not in conformity with the principles of the UN Charter, or, as long as its security is not threatened, the obligation to establish bases on Cambodian territory for the military forces of foreign powers.[104]

Leifer interpreted Cambodia's move as "the right to call for military assistance" if its security and territorial integrity would be threatened, especially for the Viet Minh, and to create "sufficient freedom of movement" for its quest for membership in the Southeast Asia defence system, being discussed in Washington, DC.[105] However, Cambodia's expressed interest in the regional defence arrangement was rejected because of the concern that its participation in the defence arrangement

would undermine the ongoing Geneva negotiations. In fact, Chinese Premier Zhou En-lai and his British counterpart Anthony Eden had reached an unofficial agreement to neutralise Cambodia and Laos as "buffer states between Vietnam and Thailand" and to prevent the postcolonial Indochinese states from joining in any military alliance.[106] In return, Zhou ensured Eden that the Viet Minh would withdraw its forces from Cambodia and Laos.[107] The Southeast Asia Collective Defence Treaty was signed on 8 September 1954, which gave birth to SEATO, whose eight member states included Britain, France, the US, Australia, New Zealand, Thailand, Pakistan, and the Philippines. With its headquarters in Bangkok, SEATO's main objective was to oppose the communist threats and thus underwrite militarily the Geneva Agreements on Indochina. A protocol attached to the Treaty provided collective measures in the event of armed attack towards the three non-communist states of Indochina (Cambodia, Laos, and South Vietnam), without demanding their commitment.[108] For Cambodia, Leifer argued, the protocol gave "rights without duties" because it offered "formal protection without ideological commitment."[109] Moreover, the protocol arrangement enabled Cambodia to deny its connection with SEATO without having to reject the American presence in the region.[110] It also allowed Cambodia to avoid provoking the communists, who were in the position to impose an imminent threat to Cambodia of "a kind that SEATO would be incapable of meeting."[111] Therefore, SEATO members' commitment to the protocol states brought a measure of protection for Cambodia against a threat of a certain kind. However, it left Cambodia only one foreign policy option – neutrality.

Neutrality: a test for Cambodia's security

As the leader of a small state in one of the hotspots of the Cold War, Sihanouk had been credited for keeping his country away from the Vietnam War by adopting the foreign policy of neutrality. It was a balancing strategy whereby the forces of one camp in the Cold War would check the forces of the other. Sihanouk explained Cambodia's neutrality, as follows:

> The influence of the communist block shall counterbalance the influence of the Western bloc. From henceforth we shall hold out one hand to the West and the other to the communists at the same time as we desire support from the active friendship of the neutrals.[112]

According to Leifer, the rationale for Cambodia's neutrality was the fact that Sihanouk viewed close association with China as a counterbalancing strategy against "any predatory ambitions of Thailand and South Vietnam" and a symbolic American presence together with its economic assistance as a means to "maintain internal security and preserve a certain freedom of manoeuvre in dealing with communist countries."[113] Moreover, Cambodia's close ties with China could check the behaviour of the communist Vietnam and the Cambodian left wing, while the Kingdom's relations with the US would keep its allies (Thailand and South Vietnam) in order.[114]

By late 1954, when Vietnam was divided along the seventeenth parallel, the Viet Minh threat to Cambodia started to recede gradually.[115] However, Sihanouk remained convinced that the possible recurrence of Viet Minh activities in Cambodia was a "constant anxiety in a subversive form that the SEATO could not address adequately."[116] At the same time, he had noticed the growing power of the PRC, as illustrated by the high degree of influence that the Chinese Premier had exercised over the representatives of the Viet Minh throughout the Geneva Conference.[117] Moreover, China's willingness to bring the conference into a successful conclusion that provided for "only limited communist gains" impressed Sihanouk.[118] In this context, a strategic dilemma Sihanouk faced was to walk a fine line in order to avoid alarming neighbours and antagonising domestic opponents due to undue association with the so-called imperialist countries, while at the same time not offending China. Smith argued that the Indian government showed Sihanouk the way out of this dilemma.[119] Following the visit of Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru to Phnom Penh in November 1954, Sihanouk seemed particularly receptive to the notion of a "league of peaceful states" committed to neither bloc.[120] A month later, the Cambodian Prime Minister Penn Nouth indicated his country's neutral posture between the communist and capitalist blocs, particularly between China and the US and emphasised that "while aid from the West would be welcomed, its acceptance would not be allowed to compromise his country's freedom of action."[121] Sihanouk went to the Bandung Conference in April 1955 to test the policy of neutrality. However, he remained concerned about the real intention of his communist neighbours – Vietnam and China. Surprisingly, Sihanouk was assured by the Chinese and Vietnamese leaders that Beijing and Hanoi would adhere faithfully to *Pancha Shila* or the five principles of peaceful co-existence with Cambodia.[122] With this assurance, Sihanouk was further convinced that neutrality would be the best foreign policy choice for Cambodia.

Cambodia's increasing insistence that it would remain neutral in the Cold War was not solely driven by external factors. Sihanouk was well aware of the domestic difficulties he had to face after Cambodia attained its independence. He foresaw that the tension between the Monarchy as an institution and the Assembly controlled by the Democratic Party and the Khmer Issaraks would not disappear overnight.[123] Furthermore, under the Geneva Agreements, the Cambodian government had promised to integrate all citizens without discrimination into the national community and to hold general elections. Sihanouk was very sure that the outcomes of elections, however, would be the unwelcomed return of Democrat dominance in the National Assembly.[124] To avert this scenario, Sihanouk was absolutely determined not to permit Son Ngoc Thanh and his close supporters to play any role in Cambodian politics. In a dramatic move in May 1955, he abdicated the throne in favour of his father, Prince Norodom Suramarit. Clearly, he recognised that his political role would be limited if he continued as the King within the bounds of the Constitution. Therefore, abdication was the only way to obstruct the return of the Democrats to dominance in the Cambodian political landscape.[125]

Consequently, he established the *Sangkum Reastre Niyum* (Socialist Community or People-Centred Society), a mass organisation cutting across old party lines

and based on loyalty to the nation and to Sihanouk. Many of the smaller political groupings that had little prospect of electoral success dissolved themselves and became attached to the *Sangkum*.[126] The *Sangkum* was primarily challenged by the Democratic Party and its new association, the *Pracheachon* (People's) Party, which was believed to be communist-inspired, with its main support from the pro-Viet Minh group. During the election, while the *Sangkum* campaigned on Sihanouk's success in obtaining independence, the main opposition groups tried to discredit the *Sangkum* by suggesting that Sihanouk was substituting French influence with the American one and warned against "the prospect of American domination," pointing to an agreement in May 1955 whereby the US would provide economic and military assistance to Cambodia.[127] Within this context, it was imperative for Sihanouk to demonstrate to his people that Cambodia's newly won and hard-fought independence was genuine and that he would make no compromise of his country's sovereignty. To demonstrate Cambodia's neutrality, during his address before the Philippine Congress in January 1956, Sihanouk emphasised:

> Cambodia, although not attracted by Communism, was in no way threatened by communist aggression and that his country would continue its current foreign policy as long as that was so. . . . [Cambodia] had "no desire to be associated with hostile ventures against China that had shown only a friendly attitude towards Cambodia. . . . Cambodia's membership in SEATO would provide the communists with an excuse to intervene in Cambodia."[128]

Deviation from neutrality: Cambodia's turn towards China

Cambodia's neutrality was understood as walking a balanced line between China and the US, in order to manipulate one power to check upon the other. By so doing, Cambodia could get support and protection from both major powers. However, although neutrality remained the fundamental principle of Cambodia's foreign policy, Sihanouk gradually lost this balance in the early 1960s, as his relationship with Beijing was increasingly strengthened mainly due to his conviction that the US would no longer be a countervailing force in Indochina to check growing threats not only from communist Vietnam but also from US allies, Thailand and South Vietnam. Initially, Sihanouk did not deviate very much from neutrality, although he strengthened his ties with Beijing. During his visit to Beijing in February 1956, Prince Sihanouk held talks with Zhou En-lai, who convinced him to believe that Cambodia would avoid the attentions of its communist neighbours as long as it could demonstrate that it would not be a "protective ward" of the Western camp.[129] Prince Sihanouk announced that Cambodia had rejected the "automatic protection of SEATO," as it was dishonourable.[130] He also signed the Sino-Cambodian "Declaration of Friendship," which marked the beginning of Cambodia's association with the PRC. Cambodia became the recipient of China's first ever grant aid of USD22.4 million to a non-communist country.[131] Eventually, Sihanouk established diplomatic ties with Beijing in July 1958 but refrained

from formalising his country's links with Hanoi, in order to avoid alienating South Vietnam, Thailand, and their patron – the US.[132] Cambodia's close relations with Beijing, however, resulted in the deterioration of its relations with Thailand and South Vietnam, which regarded the signing of the "Declaration of Friendship" between Cambodia and China as an indication of Sihanouk's willingness to serve China's interests in Indochina.[133] Leaders in South Vietnam and Thailand expressed their displeasure by closing their borders with Cambodia and imposing economic embargos. Although the crisis was resolved after the US declared its good intentions to mediate, leading to a positive response from Bangkok and Saigon, Sihanouk was further sceptical due to the growing aggressiveness of these two neighbours and his uncertainty about the US role in checking its allies.[134]

Domestically, Sihanouk was able to use this foreign policy episode to his advantage. The Prince improved his standing among the urban left. Consequently, the left-wing *Pracheachon* even agreed to join a coalition government with the *Sangkum* in April 1956.[135] As the *Sangkum* system had firm support and a strong political base in the countryside, where the highly traditional peasantry had responded positively to Sihanouk's portrayal of himself as the nation's "provider and protector of Buddhism," the *Sangkum* won another overwhelming victory in the National Assembly elections held in March 1958.[136] After the elections, Sihanouk embarked on a fresh experiment, bringing a number of young, left-wing French-trained intellectuals, including Hou Youn, Hu Nim, and Chau Seng, into his Cabinet and other positions of high responsibility.[137] This was done partly to balance the influence between the rightists and leftists in the *Sangkum* system with the objectives of maintaining political stability and ensuring the neutral direction of Cambodia's foreign policy.

Sihanouk appeared to harden his anti-US rhetoric following a large-scale intrusion into Cambodian territory by South Vietnamese troops in mid-1958 and an alleged plot by the CIA to overthrow him.[138] Sihanouk's anti-US attitude was also due to his frustration over the lack of progress in negotiations to solve the Cambodia-Thailand dispute over the Preah Vihear temple, which was under the control of Thai forces after the withdrawal of French troops from Cambodia in 1954. Still, despite tempestuous relations with the US, Sihanouk maintained a balance between China and the US. However, Cambodia's neutrality noticeably deteriorated in the early 1960s due to the deterioration of the US position first in Laos and then in South Vietnam and Sihanouk's anticipation that the US was no longer "an effective countervailing force in Indochina."[139] Moreover, due to his belief that both Laos and South Vietnam would be eventually controlled by the regime in Hanoi, Sihanouk bet his country's future on an alignment with the PRC in view of deteriorating his ties with the US.[140] For Sihanouk, close and harmonious ties with China were absolutely vital because of China's increasing influence in the region and its willingness to sacrifice communist Vietnam's vital interest as seen during the 1954 Geneva Conference.[141] He also expected that China would dominate the political landscape of Southeast Asia, particularly the Indochinese region. In this respect, it can be argued that as long as Beijing was prepared and able to exercise restraint over the Vietnamese and to a lesser degree

the Thai, Cambodia would continue to attach a great importance to its alignment with China. More importantly, the adjustment of Cambodia's strategic direction was based on Sihanouk's anticipation that the communists would triumph in Vietnam. Therefore, he sought to come to terms with Hanoi before, rather than after, the expected departure of American forces from South Vietnam. Broadly, his ultimate hopes for the future viability of Cambodia were founded on two premises: (1) historic differences, rather than ideological affinity, would determine the Sino-Vietnamese relationship; and (2) China would not wish to see a powerful Vietnam develop at the expense of other Indochinese states.[142] Sihanouk, therefore, was convinced that it would be in China's interests to interpose its power and political presence between Cambodia and Vietnam.

As a result, the deterioration of Cambodia-US ties was inevitable. The diplomatic relationship between the two countries was severed in May 1965. Unfortunately, the cut of US aid forced the Cambodian ruling elites to "extract greater profits from the peasantry," which in turn led to increasing anti-government protest in the country's rural areas.[143] This period of rising tension coincided with fresh elections in late 1966 and the subsequent appointment of a right-wing government led by General Lon Nol. In early 1967, revolts that were mainly instigated by Cambodian communists under the mastermind of Pol Pot erupted.[144] Lon Nol's attempt to suppress the rebellions by excessive force gave him only partial success but cost him the premiership in April 1967.[145] Moreover, Sihanouk's alarming response to the revolts "acted as a warning to the former *Sangkum* leftists, including Khieu Samphan, Hou Youn and Hu Nim," who shortly after disappeared.[146] Meanwhile, US military operations in South Vietnam had pushed an increasing number of communist guerrillas across the border into Cambodia. The US escalation of the Vietnam War and the accompanying communist infringements into Cambodia's eastern provinces led Sihanouk to reassess Cambodia's foreign policy direction, by, among others, re-establishing diplomatic relations with the US in mid-1969.[147] However, it was too late for Sihanouk as he started to lose control of his country, which was embroiled in increasing political instability and ideological division. While Sihanouk was absent from the country, General Lon Nol and Prince Sirik Matak staged a coup on 18 March 1970. Subsequently, the monarchy was abolished and a new regime – the Khmer Republic – was declared.

Cambodia's strategic illusions during the Cold War

Throughout the 1970s, two Cambodian regimes were engaged in strategic illusions for different reasons. First, with the backing of the most powerful superpower, the US, the KR embraced the strategic illusion that it would be able to meet the security challenges from the communist resistance and Viet Minh penetration. However, its alliance with the US, along with economic mismanagement and corruption, alienated and angered intellectuals and the moderate leftists, resulting in its demise and the rise of the Khmer Rouge or DK to power in 1975. Second, the DK adopted another type of illusion – an isolationist Maoist ideology – to revive Cambodia's past glory based on agricultural collectivism, which resulted

in the killing fields. Externally, due to suspicion and extreme hatred towards the Vietnamese, Pol Pot carried out a purge against his pro-Vietnam comrades. Such extreme hatred and excessive confidence in Chinese support motivated the DK to launch an unwinnable war with Vietnam from 1977 to 1978. This helped create an excuse for the Vietnamese to invade and occupy Cambodia over the next decade. It is clear that there is a small margin of error for a small state in the international system. The strategic illusions of Cambodia during the 1970s brought Cambodia into the most tragic chapter of the Kingdom's history.

The loss of neutrality and the eruption of civil war

The 1970 coup shattered Cambodia's neutrality and allowed the full effects of the Vietnam War to be felt in Cambodia. The end result was civil war and destruction. In fact, throughout Sihanouk's reign, despite his tilt towards Beijing and during his last months in power towards Washington, Cambodia had never cast off completely its neutrality. Sihanouk had consistently equated the concept of neutrality with Cambodia's security and survival. In stark contrast, the overtly pro-US orientation of the right-wing coup plotters was clear even before they had overthrown Prince Sihanouk for they publicly invited South Vietnamese troops to shell the communist sanctuaries in Cambodia. Two days after the coup, South Vietnamese troops entered Cambodia.[148] However, as the incursion continued, the Vietnamese communists were forced to move deeper into eastern and southern Cambodia. For the rest of his time in power, Lon Nol relied on the US as Cambodia's main patron and South Vietnam as its Indochinese ally in his battle against the revolutionary forces, supported by North Vietnam, China, and the Soviet Union. In April 1970, 12,000 South Vietnamese forces entered Cambodia, followed by a joint US-South Vietnam offensive on 1 May 1970, which involved about 8,000 US troops – the largest US offensive in Indochina since 1968.[149] President Richard Nixon was apparently convinced that the invasion would destroy the Vietnamese communist bases in Cambodia.[150] However, the US-South Vietnam military campaign "only served to further radicalize the rural Cambodian population," which had been waiting for the return of Prince Sihanouk.[151]

Following the coup, Sihanouk called upon his supporters inside Cambodia to take up arms against Lon Nol and to liberate the country from the "dictatorship and oppression of the clique of traitorous and pro-imperialist reactionaries."[152] As a result, there was an almost spontaneous outburst of rural unrests. Mass demonstrations, overtly pro-Sihanouk, took place in towns across the country, which was brutally suppressed by the army. On 5 May 1970, Sihanouk established a government-in-exile, the Royal Government of National Union of Kampuchea (RGNUK), which was immediately recognised by both China and North Vietnam.[153] Subsequently, Cambodia's political instability turned into a civil and proxy war, where the Republican forces – Lon Nol's troops backed by South Vietnamese forces – held the towns, while the revolutionary forces, the Sihanoukists and Khmer Rouge troops supported by the DRV and the PRC, controlled the countryside. The revolutionary forces increasingly extended their control over

Cambodia. In August 1972, it was estimated that the "revolutionaries controlled over 80 percent of country and half of the population."[154] As the military situation deteriorated, the urban population and armed forces became increasingly disillusioned with the Lon Nol regime. Corruption and inflation were major problems for the regime whereby US aid mainly ended up in the pockets of military generals. Moreover, the war had significantly decreased the production of rice and rubber, the country's primary exports, because the main rice-growing areas were almost entirely controlled by the RGNUK and the Khmer Rouge, and communications between the port of Kompong Som and Phnom Penh were invariably cut by guerrilla attacks.[155]

After the RGNUK and the Khmer Rouge rejected a political solution, the US embarked on a massive bombing campaign in Cambodia. Between February and August 1973, around 257,000 tons of bombs were dropped over almost all regions of the country.[156] The bombardment was certainly successful in preventing the revolutionary forces from launching immediate, successful assaults in Phnom Penh. However, it paved the way for Pol Pot to power. Kiernan pointed out that if the revolutionary forces would have been earlier allowed to overthrow Lon Nol in 1973, the Cambodian people "might well have been spared the excesses of the Khmer Rouge regime."[157] The US bombing campaigns gave the Pol Pot group political leverage within the revolution, which it might never have gained otherwise.[158] The Khmer Rouge maintained their pressure on Phnom Penh in 1973, subjecting the capital to an almost constant blockage and frequent bombardment. In the course of 1974, the military situation was stalemated and Phnom Penh remained isolated.[159] The KR forces were able to hold their ground largely because of the superiority of their equipment, while the Khmer Rouge received comparatively small amounts of military aid from China, North Vietnam, and North Korea. Eventually, the KR collapsed as Khmer Rouge fighters entered Phnom Penh on 17 April 1975. A new constitution came into force in January 1976, and Cambodia was officially renamed Democratic Kampuchea.

Democratic Kampuchea: an isolationist killing field

The DR government was officially made known to the world with Khieu Samphan as the president of the State Presidium and Noun Chea as the president of the National Assembly.[160] Despite Pol Pot's appointment as Premier, the government structure was not wholly to the advantage of his clique. A political struggle developed between the Pol Pot group and the supporters of a pro-Vietnamese line. Pol Pot consolidated his power, and over the next two years a large number of his cadres were physically eliminated. They were accused as "reactionary elements" that carried out "subversive activities."[161] Noticeably, through the crushing of the Eastern Zone and the death of the region's party secretary So Phim, Pol Pot's clique managed to gain absolute control of the party and the government.[162] In order to transform the country thoroughly, the DK regime ordered everyone out of the cities and towns. In a matter of weeks in 1975, over two million Cambodians were pushed into the countryside towards "an uncertain fate."[163] Worst still, to

purify Cambodia, the Khmer Rouge imposed a draconian system of agricultural cooperatives, turning the country into a huge slave-labour camp, oppressed by primitive violence and pure terror. Every able person was put to work in the fields, planting rice or building dams, dikes, and canals, as a response to the irrational economic policies of the party. Before the horror ended, almost two million Cambodians died due to overwork, salvations, diseases, and executions.[164]

On the foreign policy front, in the aftermath of the capture of Phnom Penh, the DK immediately adopted an isolationist policy. The DK had almost cut itself off from the region and the rest of the world. It had only diplomatic relations with a few countries, such as China, Vietnam, and Sweden. While China was the DK's key strategic ally, its relationship with Vietnam was characterised by growing mistrust.[165] During the initial 30 years of its struggle, the Khmer Rouge and North Vietnam were allies. However, the DK government did not trust its Vietnamese allies due to concerns over border issues as well as the alleged grand strategic question of an Indochinese federation.[166] While bilateral relations between Phnom Penh and Hanoi suffered, border skirmishes between the two sides continued. The situation was further complicated by the fact that Pol Pot and his colleagues believed that Cambodian minorities in southern Vietnam, known as *Khmer Krom* or lowland Khmer, were ready to overthrow Vietnamese rule and they wanted to attach these minorities to the Cambodian motherland.[167] Vietnam's attempts on several occasions to negotiate with the DK government regarding the border issues received a negative response from Phnom Penh.

China played a crucially important role behind Pol Pot's aggressiveness towards Vietnam. In the eyes of Chinese officials, according to Chandler, Vietnam was perceived as a "pro-Soviet threat along their southern borders" and considered Cambodia a "conveniently radical ally."[168] Consequently, China supplied a large amount of arms, ammunitions, and military equipment to the DK. Moreover, Pol Pot's visit to China in 1977 further strengthened the DK-PRC alliance. However, it was viewed by Hanoi as a strategic threat.[169] Therefore, in response to DK attacks, Vietnam launched a counterattack in mid-December 1977, which penetrated deep inside Cambodian territory.[170] After the failure of the last attempts at the negotiation table, both sides increased their military forces along the border. On 3 November 1978, Vietnam signed a 25-year treaty of friendship with the Soviet Union, which was an assurance from Moscow to balance against the Chinese threat.[171] In the meantime, the Vietnamese soon began "grooming some defectors from DK as a government in exile" and gave them military training.[172] On Christmas Day of 1978, over 100,000 Vietnamese forces attacked DK on several fronts.[173] The DK abandoned the capital city on 7 January 1979, marking the demise of the regime. From then, Cambodian fighting factions embarked on a costly struggle that played into the hands of the great powers. The great powers, in turn, were not prepared to take risks. The evidence was that Pol Pot requested the Chinese to provide volunteers, but that request was turned down.[174] It is clear that the last days of the DK and those of the Lon Nol regime in 1975 were ironic. Both regimes were abandoned by their respective patrons – China and the US.

Cambodia: a pawn of the great power politics

Soon after capturing Phnom Penh, Hanoi established a new regime – the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK). For the first time since 1953, Cambodia was once again totally controlled by a foreign power. However, the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia turned the country into a battleground of the great powers that supported different factions in the Cambodian civil war. The PRK was supported by Vietnam and the Soviet Union, while the anti-Vietnamese factions by China, the US, and ASEAN. Therefore, throughout the 1980s, the Cambodians no longer determined the fate of their country, which became a pawn in the great power politics of the Cold War. Vietnam's military adventure in Cambodia angered the Chinese, who launched a two-week attack on northern Vietnam in February 1979, with the tacit support of the US, in order to "teach Vietnam a lesson."[175] The Chinese military attack did not change the Vietnamese course of action in Cambodia. However, the repercussion of the attack was to "strengthen the US-China alliance."[176]

Vietnamese military actions in Cambodia also shocked ASEAN member states, particularly Thailand. One of the immediate consequences of the Vietnamese military intervention in Cambodia for the region was the fact that the "buffer that Kampuchea provided for ASEAN, and especially Thailand, had now given way."[177] In response, a special ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting was convened in Bangkok on 12 January 1979. Its joint statement "deplored the armed intervention against the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Kampuchea" and called for "the immediate and total withdrawal of all foreign forces from Kampuchea territory."[178] In June 1979, in the face of Vietnamese cross-border incursion into Thailand, ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting expressed "firm support and solidarity in the preservation of Thailand's independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity."[179] The Cambodian crisis also encouraged Thailand's alignment with China. The alignment was beneficial to the DK military remnants along the Thai border and made the Vietnamese even more reluctant to withdraw from Cambodia.[180] By the end of 1979, the refugee camps in Thailand "sheltered several anti-Vietnamese resistance factions," which were supported by China and later by the US, as well as ASEAN.[181] Among the anti-Vietnamese fighting factions, the Khmer Rouge was the largest and most effective combat force thanks to China's support and assistance. The other two factions were the royalist forces of FUNCIPEC led by Sihanouk and the Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF) headed by Son San. In mid-1982, ASEAN uneasily brought the resistance factions under the umbrella of the Coalition Government for Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK).[182] For the next decade, however, the three factions continued to distrust each other, and militarily, coalition forces were not particularly effective.[183] By 1983, the Vietnamese had raised and trained the PRK army to about 30,000 strong.[184] For the rest of the 1980s, a military stalemate prevailed. Following the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops in September 1989, coalition troops consolidated their bases inside the country. Chandler argued that there were two key factors that encouraged the Vietnamese to withdraw the

last of their troops from Cambodia: (1) growing self-sufficiency of the Hanoi-supported PRK, which earlier in 1989 had renamed itself the State of Cambodia (SOC); and (2) a sharp decrease of aid and assistance from the Soviet bloc to Vietnam due to economic and political crises that swept through the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.[185]

Having said that, many of Cambodia's problems were still imposed from the outside world. Optimistically, in July 1990, US Secretary of State James Baker announced that the US would cease backing the CGDK's representatives at the UN.[186] Baker's move encouraged China to diminish its patronage, the DK.[187] Such a compromise by the great powers paved the way for the signing of the Paris Peace Agreements on 23 October 1991. Under the terms of the agreements, a temporary government was established comprising representatives of all factions. As a result, the Supreme National Council (SNC) was established on 14 November 1991, with Prince Sihanouk as the president, who was warmly welcomed in Phnom Penh after spending 12 years living in exile. The UN peacekeeping forces – the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) – were deployed to monitor the Paris Peace Agreements and to supervise the elections on 23 May 1993. Although the FUNCIPEC party led by Prince Norodom Ranariddh won the elections by a small margin, he was pressured to share power with Hun Sen in a co-premiership government. The second Kingdom of Cambodia was officially established. Peace was made, but political fragility remained due to political struggle within the coalition government and the Khmer Rouge's continued resistance in provinces along the Cambodian-Thai border. Cambodia's history was turned into a new chapter.

Post-UNTAC Cambodia: the return of neutrality and regional engagement

Following the creation of the second Kingdom of Cambodia in 1993, Phnom Penh reinstated neutrality and non-alignment as the fundamental principles of its foreign policy after decades of civil war, isolation, and foreign interventions. Article 53 of the 1993 Cambodian Constitution stimulates that "The Kingdom of Cambodia adopts policy of permanent neutrality and non-alignment . . . follows a policy of peaceful co-existence with its neighbours and with all other countries in the world."[188] Cambodia's foreign policy direction in the post-UNTAC era was shaped by its political dynamics following the May 1993 elections under the UN auspices. The elections produced a popular vote of 45 per cent (58 seats in the National Assembly) for the FUNCINPEC, 38 per cent (51 seats) for the CPP, and 16 per cent (11 seats) for a variety of small parties.[189] However, Hun Sen and other CPP leaders did not recognise the result of the elections and threatened the secession of several eastern provinces. Newly restored King Sihanouk negotiated a compromise, providing for a coalition government to be equally divided between the FUNCINPEC and the CPP in which Prince Ranariddh and Hun Sen were appointed as the First and Second Prime Ministers of the FUNCIPEC-CPP coalition government. Therefore, one can argue that Cambodia's foreign policy at that time reflected the distribution of power between the CPP and the FUNCINPEC,

as well as the influence of external powers that were exerting over the two parties, particularly China, the US, and Vietnam. Moreover, after the UNTAC departure, Cambodia relied heavily on foreign assistance, especially from major powers, including the US, Japan, Australia, France, and Canada. In 1994, donor countries and development partners pledged USD770 million in aid to Cambodia, followed by USD520 million in the next year.[190] Therefore, Cambodia's foreign policy towards external powers, particularly the US, Japan, the EU, and China, was a top priority.

Cambodia attempted to strengthen bilateral relations with its neighbouring countries. Traditionally, Cambodia-Laos bilateral ties were considered 'special relations' as Cambodian officials viewed that "both countries shared a long tradition of friendship and harmony."[191] Cambodia also maintained and promoted its relations with other two neighbours – Vietnam and Thailand. However, there were some constraints and challenges. As for its neighbour to the east, Cambodia ceased being Vietnam's dependent ally in the aftermath of the UNTAC. Cambodia-Vietnam relations remained quite close and cooperative due to personal relations and friendship of Second Prime Minister Hun Sen and his CPP with Vietnamese leaders. Having said that, the status of ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia and border demarcation remained two contentious issues, preventing both countries from being "special friends."[192] The ethnic Vietnamese residents became a major political issue in which over 30 Vietnamese were murdered in scattered protests leading up to the May 1993 elections.[193] As pre-election violence mounted, tens of thousands of ethnic Vietnamese fled to Vietnam. Following the 1993 elections and the formation of the coalition government, the status of the ethnic Vietnamese became a main sticking point in Cambodia's relations with Vietnam. Border demarcation has also been a major irritant in the bilateral relations. The territorial issues are politically sensitive, in particular in Cambodia, because there is a strong established perception that Cambodia has historically lost territory to Vietnam. Broadly speaking, Cambodia's perception is that Vietnam has expanded its territory at the expanse of Cambodia.[194] King Sihanouk called for a review of border issues and redrawing of the boundary if necessary.[195] Similarly, Cambodia's relationship with Thailand was not as cordial as it should have been. Leaders in Phnom Penh continued to perceive their western neighbour with suspicion due to occasional border clashes.[196] Worst still, the history of Cambodia-Thailand relations has been distorted and mixed with nationalism to serve the power interests of the Thai and Cambodian leaders.[197]

As the Cold War came to an end, the ideological division of Asia and the world at large was brought down, which allowed Cambodia to attempt to exercise the foreign policy of neutrality and non-alignment in a new framework of an "open door" policy through strategic engagement with the outside world, especially with ASEAN.[198] Cambodian leaders saw a need to balance traditional diplomacy, which relies primarily on bilateral relations, with new diplomacy that emphasises the importance of multilateral relations. The rationale of the engagement in both bilateral and multilateral diplomacy was primarily due to Cambodian leaders' reflection on the past failure of their country's foreign policy, especially the

strategic illusions of the KR and the DK. Therefore, integrating Cambodia into the region became a foreign policy priority. Since the inception of ASEAN in 1967, Cambodia had missed the opportunity to participate in ASEAN due to conflict and isolation. Following the 1993 elections, Cambodia made overtures towards ASEAN. Cambodia's keen interest in ASEAN reflected the reactions of Cambodian leaders to the failure of the country's foreign policy in the past, especially the policies of the KR and the DK. By then, one of Phnom Penh's primary concerns was Cambodia's isolation in the region and international community.[199] Therefore, joining ASEAN was a maximisation of its foreign policy options in the post–Cold War era, by moving away from isolation towards integration in ASEAN.[200] As a result, a year after UNTAC's departure, Phnom Penh took concrete steps to join ASEAN. Cambodia became an ASEAN observer in 1994 and acceded to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) in 1995. Eventually, it was admitted as the tenth member of ASEAN on 30 April 1999.

Conclusion

The long history of Cambodia, especially after the collapse of the Angkor Empire in 1431, provides interesting insights on how the foreign policy of this small state has been shaped. There were four important lessons from the history of Cambodia's search for security and survival. First, the country's geography of being surrounded by the two powerful, historically antagonistic neighbours – Thailand and Vietnam – had been a persistent compelling factor shaping its strategic outlook. Cambodian leaders have never taken for granted security threats from these two neighbours. Second, whenever necessary and available, Cambodian leaders had sought support and assistance from external power(s) to address their geopolitical predicament as illustrated by the acceptance of the French protectorate in 1863, the Lon Nol's alliance with the US in the aftermath of the 1970 coup, and the strengthening of the DK-PRC alliance in the second half of the 1970s. Third, strategic choices that Cambodia had adopted depended primarily on great power relations and, especially, the distribution of power in mainland Southeast Asia. For instance, neutrality was not Sihanouk's initially desired option. However, as Cambodia was initially rejected to join the SEATO due to an agreement among the major powers on the neutralisation of Cambodia, the foreign policy of neutrality and non-alignment was the default option. Similarly, the Vietnamese patronage from 1979 to 1989 was also the default option for the PRK as the regime was isolated and pressurised from the international community, especially China, the US, Thailand, and ASEAN. Finally, whatever strategic options Cambodia adopted, there were always costs for this small state. The balancing game against powerful neighbours – Thailand and Vietnam – by playing one rival against the other resulted in the loss of Cambodian territory. Similarly, Cambodia had to pay a big price by losing its independence and sovereign rights from 1863 to 1953 in accepting the French protectorate. Even worse, the Kingdom faced a civil war due to the abandonment of its neutrality in 1970 and experienced the killing fields because of its alliance with the US and later China in the 1970s.

As far as China was concerned, its role had been less significant in safeguarding and protecting Cambodia's sovereignty and survival from its predatory neighbours in the early stage. However, in the post-independence Cambodia, China happened to be crucial for Cambodia's strategic direction. Therefore, questions that remain pertinent to Cambodia's foreign policy include: (1) Are the compelling factors that had shaped Cambodia's strategic direction over the last seven centuries still relevant? (2) Have the weaknesses and failures of past foreign policy options influenced Cambodia's current and future strategic choices? (3) What is and will be the role of China in Cambodia's persistent search for security? The task of the following chapters is to answer these crucially important questions.

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3 Cambodia-China ties, 1997–2008

Hedging against risks

From the mid-1990s to the late 2000s, Cambodia's foreign policy entered into uncharted territory, as Prime Minister Hun Sen had yet to settle on any particular strategic option. He attempted to exercise a balanced approach towards Cambodia's key partners, including his traditional friends in Hanoi, his new friends in Beijing, Cambodia's biggest benefactors in the West, including Japan and the US, as well as ASEAN. It can be argued that during that time Cambodia adopted a hedging strategy by avoiding selecting any clear strategic option with the objective of maximising benefits and minimising risks from Cambodia's relations with those key partners. Phnom Penh also tried to play one potential threat against the others in a way that could provide Cambodia more room to manoeuvre. As far as Cambodia-China relations were concerned, the military clashes between the CPP and FUNCINPEC in Phnom Penh on 5–6 July 1997 pushed Hun Sen and his ruling CPP closer to Beijing. China happened to be an important source of financial support and investment as well as diplomatic protection for the CPP against Western condemnations and economic sanctions. In this context, Hun Sen attempted to woo China to balance the West, particularly the US, and to cushion pressure from Cambodia's neighbours – Thailand and Vietnam. Moreover, since the Cambodian membership in ASEAN was suspended in the aftermath of the July 1997 armed clashes, Cambodian strategists also believed that Cambodia's close ties with China would generate necessary pressure on ASEAN to admit the Kingdom into the regional grouping.

However, there were a number of constraints in Cambodia's foreign relations with China. First, Phnom Penh remained ambivalent about Beijing due to its mistrust and fear of China's past interference in Cambodia. Second, Phnom Penh was concerned that its excessively close ties with Beijing would alienate Western powers and Japan, which were Cambodia's largest markets and biggest benefactors. Third, the role of Vietnam for Cambodia's security and political survival of the ruling CPP throughout the 1990s and early 2000s could not be discounted. Hun Sen remained a frequent visitor to Hanoi, and the CPP maintained close links with the Vietnamese Communist Party. For its part, Hanoi tried to win back its influence in the post-1997 Cambodia, through economic initiatives and strengthened personal ties with leaders in Phnom Penh. Lastly, after joining ASEAN on 30 April 1999, leaders in Phnom Penh were initially convinced that the new

diplomacy of multilateralism and regional integration, rather than the realpolitik of the old diplomacy, would be a new approach for Cambodia to pursue its economic prosperity and to safeguard its sovereignty and autonomy.[1] Phnom Penh placed high confidence in ASEAN, with the conviction that it would be a crucial regional platform through which Cambodia could promote its strategic and economic interests.

Cambodia in China's foreign policy

Due to historical, geopolitical, and economic considerations, Chinese foreign policymakers have regarded Southeast Asia as an important doorstep for China to continue promoting its prosperity and regional influence. As a part of the region with an important strategic location, Cambodia has attracted a particular attention from Chinese leaders who believe that the Kingdom can make significant contributions to China's national security and economic growth. Cambodian membership in the Southeast Asian regional grouping – ASEAN – adds diplomatic and strategic weight to China's Cambodia policy.

China's foreign policy objectives towards Southeast Asia

Southeast Asia has always been a region of vital importance to China due to Beijing's traditional security concerns as well as geopolitical and economic interests. As far as security is concerned, China's history of being invaded by powers along its peripheries has produced a deep-seated fear of invasion and encirclement.[2] From a Chinese perspective, both the US and the Soviet Union used Southeast Asia as an important region in their plots to encircle China during the Cold War. These perceived security threats on China's borders had motivated leaders in Beijing to make economic sacrifices to ensure that China had sufficient military capabilities to deal with those threats.[3] After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the US withdrawal from mainland Southeast Asia, China tried to strengthen its relations with the region to prevent any attempt by regional countries to form an "anti-China coalition."[4]

Contemporarily, given America's strong relationship with Japan, several Chinese analysts have referred Southeast Asia as the best place to break the US strategic encirclement of China.[5] Many Chinese analysts have also shared the view that improving relations with its southern peripheries would help China address the "possible downturn in US-China relations."[6] The most effective way to deal with foreign pressure, according to this view, is to build a "ring of political friendship" on China's peripheries.[7] Such an effort would allow China to command more respect and to be in a stronger position to handle its relationship with the US. China's improved relations with Southeast Asia would also help to further isolate Taiwan and make it less capable of achieving permanent separation, if not formal independence. As Southeast Asian countries increasingly value their relations with the PRC, they will become less likely to offend the mainland by supporting

Taiwan's political manoeuvres.[8] In addition, China's trade and security engagement with the region would also limit Taiwan's ability to be a part of regional cooperation mechanisms. As a result, Taiwan has not been able to participate in any ASEAN-led regional forums.

Geopolitically, Beijing's relations with Southeast Asia would be significant for China's international standing that would, to a large extent, rest on its regional influence. Stuart-Fox argues that China's influence beyond its frontiers is limited by major powers in three directions: to the east by Japan, to the north by Russia, and to the west by India (see Map 3.1).[9] Xinjiang hardly provides an ideal base

Map 3.1 East Asia

Source: Google Map

from which to project Chinese influence due to ethnic tensions in the region.[10] Therefore, Southeast Asia is the primary target for China to expand its regional influence. Moreover, as of the late 2000s, there are over 20 million ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia, which might provide an opportunity for Beijing to exert its soft power in the region and beyond.[11] Economically, stabilising China's doorsteps has allowed China to focus on economic development during what China's leaders have proclaimed the "period of strategic opportunity" in the early twenty-first century.[12] Regional stability in Southeast Asia has also been important for China's development because its trade, especially oil imports, passes through the region. China's rapid economic growth has led to increasing dependence on foreign seaborne resources. As of the late 2000s, China was the world's second-largest importer of oil and consumed 50 per cent of the world's cement, more than 33 per cent of the world steel, 25 per cent of the world's copper, and 20 per cent of the world's aluminium.[13] China's import of those resources transits key strategic maritime choke points in Southeast Asia, particularly the Malacca Straits and the South China Sea. China continued to be increasingly dependent on energy passing through Southeast Asia. More importantly, as a source of natural resources, investment, and trade, Southeast Asia would make significant contributions to China's economic modernisation throughout the 1990s and the 2000s. Noticeably, China's trade with ASEAN has been rising rapidly, increasing by an average 75 per cent per year over the period 1993–2001.[14] From 1997 to 2006, China's exports to ASEAN increased from USD12.7 billion to USD71.2 billion, and its imports went up from USD12.4 billion to USD89.5 billion.[15] Beijing was convinced that the promotion of economic interaction with mainland Southeast Asia would help fuel prosperity in China's economically backward southwest provinces, such as Yunnan and Guangxi.[16] In fact, Southeast Asia, particularly mainland Southeast Asia, could provide "outlets to the maritime trade routes – Myanmar to the Indian Ocean, Cambodia through Laos to the Gulf of Thailand – for landlocked southwest part of China, which suffers from underdevelopment compared to China's wealthy coastal provinces."[17]

To sum up, China's objectives in Southeast Asia included (a) maintaining a stable political and security environment on China's periphery that would allow its economic growth to continue; (b) promoting trade through the region; (c) gaining access to regional energy resources and raw materials; (d) developing trade relations for economic and political purposes; (e) isolating Taiwan through the pursuit of a policy China calls "using all economic and diplomatic resources" to reward countries that are willing to isolate Taiwan; and (f) exerting influence over the region to defeat perceived attempts at strategic encirclement or containment, especially by the US and its allies.

Cambodia in the eyes of China's foreign policy establishment

China has been paying great attention to Cambodia. Nayan Chanda observed that, since the demise of the Soviet Union, "China has paid much greater attention to the Southeast Asia, and Cambodia in particular."[18] Traditionally, China's security

objective in Southeast Asia, particularly mainland Southeast Asia, had been to "keep the countries in the region divided and weak."[19] The modern manifestation of China's traditional policy of keeping neighbours in check has remained a "leitmotif of Beijing's approach to Indochina."[20] In this regard, China's age-old policy was to maintain an "independent Cambodia to balance the power of Vietnam in the region."[21] Contemporarily, China has acted as an important trading partner and donor of Cambodia with an eye to buffering Vietnam's leverage in the region.[22] Moreover, being situated in the centre of mainland Southeast Asia, Cambodia stands to make a significant contribution to China's national security. Since 1955, China has demonstrated a strong desire for access to Cambodia, whether with the purpose of countering the US influence, funnelling supplies to North Vietnam, or constraining a unified Vietnam. Later on, China's increasing exports and growing demand for oil have been driving Chinese strategists to pay more attention to Cambodia's strategic location, which is crucial for Beijing to project its power into the South China Sea as well as the Pacific and Indian Oceans.[23] In this regard, the Cambodian port of Sihanoukville would offer China an "excellent base for projecting maritime power into the Gulf of Thailand and the Straits of Malacca."[24]

Thanks to its membership in ASEAN, Cambodia, along with Laos and Myanmar, would contribute to the realisation of China's interests in the region. As Southeast Asia has been of growing importance to Beijing's global power projection, Cambodia's membership in ASEAN is crucial, as Phnom Penh's support would significantly serve China's interests in the region. Obviously, after the end of the Cold War, there were countries in Southeast Asia that enjoyed close ties with the US, including two US treaty allies – Thailand and the Philippines – that stood in the way of China's dominance of that part of Asia and might provoke, with the help of the US, anti-China movement within ASEAN. Hence, it is argued that if China could maintain a divided ASEAN, it would prevent any anti-China security consensus from developing in Southeast Asia.[25] As China's interest in the South China Sea has grown, Cambodia's pro-China position on the maritime dispute in the area would prevent ASEAN claimant states from retaining a regional consensus against China. Moreover, in geopolitical terms, China's interest in Cambodia can be linked to its security and oversight in the South China Sea to safeguard Beijing's claims to the disputed islands and the resources in the region.[26]

In this context, after the re-establishment of a new government in Cambodia following the UNTAC-sponsored election in May 1993, Beijing immediately took the diplomatic offensive towards Phnom Penh in order to re-exert and promote its influence in the country, with regular high-level meetings between leaders of both countries. Between 1993 and 1997, there were at least 32 high-level meetings in Beijing, Phnom Penh, and New York.[27] Interestingly, China maintained "even-handed relations" with the winner of the national elections, the royalist FUNCINPEC party, and the CPP, as well as other minor parties.[28] This balanced approach was based on Beijing's conviction that, in addition to the election victory, the prestige of FUNCINPEC's founder and former president, King Sihanouk, would enable the royalist party to counterbalance Hun Sen's dominant role.[29] Moreover, Beijing's balanced position towards the FUNCIPEC and the CPP would

encourage the latter to become more independent from Hanoi.[30] Thereafter, China increasingly cultivated closer links with Hun Sen. Hun Sen's visit to China on 18–23 July 1996 was noticeable as Chinese hosts sent a special plane to pick him up from Phnom Penh.[31] Before leaving Phnom Penh, Hun Sen said that his visit to China and the meetings with both Chinese President Jiang Zemin and Premier Li Peng would help end "the suspicion of the past."[32] It is argued that Beijing's rapprochement with Hun Sen was not an endorsement of the CPP but rather because FUNCINPEC's performance had "not inspired confidence" and often been disappointed due to the perception in Beijing that FUNCINPEC leaders tended to look for support from outside the country, particularly the US.[33]

Hun Sen's scepticism towards Beijing

Although Hun Sen started to recognise the growing importance of China in Cambodia's economic and political developments, his scepticism and fear of China remained. On the one hand, Hun Sen believed that improving relations with Beijing was crucial for the CPP to maintain the dominant role in the coalition government with the FUNCINPEC. This was due to his concern over the potential re-establishment of military alliance between the FUNCIPEC and the Khmer Rouge.[34] Within years following the 1993 election, Hun Sen and Ranariddh were already at odds over how to improve the distribution of power within the coalition and the re-integration of Khmer Rouge forces.[35] Hun Sen feared that a renewed FUNCINPEC-Khmer Rouge military alliance would pose a great risk for the CPP's grip on power and might again attract the support and interference from external powers into Cambodian politics.[36] In fact, the First and Second Prime Ministers – Prince Ranariddh and Hun Sen – began to compete for Khmer Rouge defections since early 1996. As far as security is concerned, China played an important role in the reintegration of the former Khmer Rouge into Cambodian society. According to Leldres, as the Khmer Rouge movement began disintegrating with different factions manoeuvring to take power, China negotiated Khmer Rouge defection to the Cambodian armed forces.[37] In August 1996, Hun Sen obtained the defection of Ieng Sary, Deputy Prime Minister in charge of foreign affairs of the Khmer Rouge regime, to the government following the defeat of the Khmer Rouge forces in Pailin.[38]

On the other hand, Hun Sen's residue of mistrust towards Beijing remained profound and could not disappear overnight. He remained sceptical about Chinese intentions due to Beijing's support of the Khmer Rouge in the past and its close ties with the royalists. It is worth noticing that, in his 1988 essay, Hun Sen argued that "China was the root of all that was evil in Cambodia."[39] Even after the 1991 Paris Peace Agreements, Chinese leaders still referred to the CPP as a "puppet of Hanoi."[40] Therefore, Hun Sen and the Cambodians in general were suspicious of Beijing's intention in Cambodia, especially its commitment to the Paris Peace Agreements. This became increasingly alarming when Chinese leaders were not able to dissuade the Khmer Rouge from withdrawing from the Agreements. The suspicion continued to grow as Hun Sen received a lukewarm reception during his

visit with Prince Ranariddh to China in 1993, the first trip they made in their official capacity as co-Premiers.[41] During this period, it was clear that although the relationship between the CPP and China slowly improved after Beijing adopted an anti-Khmer Rouge policy, it remained fragile and uncertain.[42] Prime Minister Hun Sen's close aide pointed out that "China is like fire. . . . If you get too close you get burnt, if you are too far you feel the chill."[43] Hence, the future prospects for the improvement of CPP-Beijing relations would depend at least on two aspects: (1) China's non-interference in the CPP-FUNCINPEC power struggle; and (2) China's role in integrating Khmer Rouge remnants into the government.

Hun Sen's policy shift towards China

Hun Sen's ties with Beijing had been gradually strengthened. Noticeably, the relationship experienced a remarkable transformation following the military violence in Phnom Penh on 5–6 July 1997, which allowed Hun Sen and his CPP to consolidate power. The strengthening of Cambodia-China relations resulted from strategic convergence between Phnom Penh and Beijing. Moreover, China had become an important source of financial and political support as well as security protection for the Hun Sen regime. In return, Cambodia could help China to realise its economic, diplomatic, and strategic interests in Southeast Asia.

The July 1997 violent crisis and international responses

In late 1996, the power struggle between the CPP and the FUNCINPEC and their competition for Khmer Rouge defections began to surface clearly.[44] The competition for Khmer Rouge troops was crucial for both sides as it would ensure "national domination" and create the "historical legacy of being the party that finally vanquished the movement."[45] As the year 1997 dawned, Hun Sen-Ranariddh mutual mistrust and suspicion reached another low. "Horse-trading" and "alliance-building" unfolded, as both parties cast an eye towards the national election due in July 1998.[46] Prince Ranariddh announced the formation of a new political alliance with Son Sann and, particularly, with his former Minister of Finance Sam Rainsy, who had just created a new party – the Khmer National Party. Rainsy did not trust the Prince but described him as "the lesser of two evils" next to Hun Sen, who was "like someone from a different planet" and a "wild man" who trampled on democratic norms.[47]

By late June 1997, Hun Sen accused Prince Ranariddh of bringing demobilised Khmer Rouge troops to Phnom Penh without permission and of illegally importing weapons.[48] From 5 to 6 July, CPP troops roamed through Phnom Penh, where FUNCINPEC offices were ransacked and the party's military and civilian leaders were pursued. It was reported that more than 40 political opponents were executed and hundreds were arrested, while many others went underground or fled abroad.[49] Price Ranariddh fled to France shortly before Hun Sen's seizure of power. There is still a heating debate over which side initiated the violence that led to Hun Sen's takeover in 1997. Hun Sen charged Prince Ranariddh with treason

in allegedly planning to bring Khmer Rouge units to join FUNCINPEC forces in the capital. He also claimed that the CPP had been forced to act to preserve peace and security as well as the legitimacy of the constitutional government.[50] More profoundly, CPP leaders feared that a renewed FUNCINPEC-Khmer Rouge military alliance might again attract foreign powers' support as in the 1979–1991 civil war.[51] The CPP emerged victorious in the military clashes. To maintain legitimacy, a FUNCINCPEC member and then Foreign Minister Ung Huot was installed to replace Prince Ranariddh as the First Prime Minister. By so doing, Hun Sen claimed that the CPP was still abiding by the Paris Agreements and the will of the Cambodian people as expressed in the 1993 election.

However, Hun Sen and his CPP party had to pay a heavy price. First, in the aftermath of the violence, Cambodia's international image was once again damaged. Critics of Hun Sen asserted that the event constituted a "premeditated coup d'état," in which Hun Sen, who was "hungry for unchallenged control," engineered the seizure of power.[52] On 28 July 1997, the US House of Representatives passed Resolution 195, calling the armed clashes a "violent military coup d'état."[53] Cambodia's other major donors, including Australia, Japan, and the EU, expressed concern at the violence.[54] ASEAN delayed the admission of Cambodia, which was supposed to join the grouping along with Laos and Myanmar in July 1997. This gave the appearance that Cambodia was a pariah in its neighbourhood.[55] Worse still, the United Nations Credentials Committee decided to leave the Cambodian seat vacant. Cambodia was not able to assume its seat in the UN until December 1998, following the formation of a new government.[56] In this context, the resumption of the Cambodian seat in the UN and its membership in ASEAN were key to rebuilding the international legitimacy of the CPP following the July 1997 crisis.

Second, Phnom Penh had to also pay a heavy social and economic price for lost foreign aid and sacrificed development opportunities. Major foreign donors froze a large part of foreign assistance, which accounted for about half of Cambodia's annual government budget. At the Consultation Group Meeting, a few days before the armed clashes between the Cambodian government and donor partners, including Japan, the US, the European Commission, the Asian Development (ADB), the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and other UN agencies, the donor community pledged to give Cambodia USD475 million, but the actual amount of disbursement was only around USD375 million.[57] Consequently, the US adopted a tough approach by not only blaming Hun Sen and the CPP for the military clashes but also suspending its USD25 million aid programme, unless a "democratically-elected government is reconstituted."[58] Similarly, the World Bank, IMF, and ADB curtailed their country programmes in Cambodia.[59] Clearly, Cambodia was hit hard, especially in the area of budgetary aid and the balance of payment support in the aftermath of the military clashes. According to ADB figures, Cambodia's gross domestic product (GDP) grew only 2 per cent in 1997, with zero growth in 1998 compared to 7 per cent in 1996.[60]

Third, CPP leaders shared the perception that Cambodia's sovereignty and national security came under serious challenge from the international community. In fact, Cambodia has previously been a marked case with a specific history of

destructive Western interventions throughout the Cold War. After the July 1997 crisis, the whole world seemed to accept Ranariddh's claim that the violence had been a coup initiated by Hun Sen to consolidate his grip on power. Prince Ranariddh, who was exiled in Bangkok, appealed for international intervention in support of his military forces at the Cambodia-Thailand border region of O'Smach under the command of General Nhek Bunchhay, who was reportedly in secret contact with Khmer Rouge commanders, including Ta Mok.[61] Within days that followed, 80,000 royalists and Khmer Rouge soldiers crossed into new refugee camps on the Thai side of the border.[62] Phnom Penh saw these developments as a possible return to civil war with support from external powers that would pose an acute danger to the peace and stability of Cambodia. More noticeably, breaking with its past practice of non-interference, ASEAN formed ASEAN Troika, which was comprised of three Foreign Ministers of Thailand, Indonesia, and the Philippines, to help find a political solution to the crisis.[63] The ASEAN Troika went to Phnom Penh in June 1998 to persuade Hun Sen to come to the negotiating table with Prince Ranariddh. Hun Sen rebuffed the intervention of the Troika and called its action "an interference into the internal affairs of Cambodia and a violation of the non-interference principle of ASEAN."[64]

Phnom Penh's partnership with Beijing: motives and interests

Following the July 1997 crisis, Phnom Penh started to realise the increasingly important roles of China for Cambodia not only in political and economic domains but also for the security and strategic direction of the Kingdom. First, China emerged as a major power that could provide the Hun Sen regime with political and economic breathing space as Phnom Penh was condemned and isolated again from the region and the world. Beijing's response to the July 1997 violent conflict in Phnom Penh was subtly different from the rest of the world for the very reason that it provided legitimacy, financial aid, and political support to Phnom Penh. China was the first country to recognise the change of Cambodian government after the armed clashes.[65] While continuing to welcome King Sihanouk to Beijing for medical treatment, China did not support his son, Prince Ranariddh. Instead, Chinese leaders reiterated the principle of non-interference and highlighted the will of the Cambodian people.[66] China also opposed the imposition of international sanctions against Phnom Penh and urged Western countries to stay away from Cambodia's internal affairs.[67] In December 1997, China delivered 116 military cargo trucks and 70 jeeps valued at USD2.8 million in what both sides claimed the part of a deal that predated the July 1997 event.[68] At the ceremony to receive the vehicles, Hun Sen praised China's sympathetic attitude towards the post-July 1997 Cambodia, by stating:

> Although some international community members have not yet clearly understood the real situation in Cambodia, a number of friendly countries have maintained their just and fair stance on the Cambodia issue. Among them, the People's Republic of China, which has firmly adhered to the principle

> of peaceful coexistence, continues to respect the Kingdom of Cambodia's independence and sovereignty and does not poke its nose into Cambodian internal affairs.[69]

More importantly, China was the first country that invited Hun Sen for an official visit in February 1999. With satisfaction, Hun Sen publicly expressed his thanks to China for maintaining neutrality and upholding the principle of non-interference in Cambodia's internal affairs.[70] China's assistance continued to provide economic breathing space for Phnom Penh. From August to December 1997, Beijing announced approximately USD20 million in new aid for Cambodia.[71] During Hun Sen's official visit to China in February 1999, China offered USD18.3 million in foreign assistance and USD200 million in non-interest loans for infrastructure projects, the biggest amount of assistance China had ever provided to any foreign country in the world.[72] By early 2001, Cambodia had received almost USD40 million in Chinese aid, including a USD3 million military package, and USD200 million in commercial credit, most of it for Chinese companies operating in Cambodia.[73] More noticeably, during his visit to Cambodia in 2002, Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji announced that China would forgive all loans to Cambodia that had matured, most of which had been issued during the Khmer Rouge regime.[74] There is no official document related to the total amount of the debt made available to the public. But estimates from sources at the Embassy of PRC in Phnom Penh varied from USD60 million to as high as USD1 billion.[75] Chinese companies became increasingly active in the post-1997 Cambodia. In the second half of 1997, China-Cambodia trade soared 91 per cent compared to the same period of 1996, reaching to about USD62.7 million.[76] Similarly, while investment from ASEAN drastically dropped due to the Asian financial crisis in 1997–1998, investment from China and Hong Kong to Cambodia steadily increased.[77]

Second, China's political support and economic assistance was also crucial for the CPP to address immediate and long-term security challenges, namely the threat from Khmer Rouge remnants and a potential Khmer Rouge-FUNCINPEC military alliance, as well as the traditional threat from Cambodia's neighbouring countries. Despite massive defections in 1996, the remaining "hard-line" Khmer Rouge forces were still a security threat to Phnom Penh.[78] Although Pol Pot died in April 1998, Ta Mok, Khieu Samphan, and Nuon Chea remained desperate to discredit the breakaway leaders and to woo them back.[79] To address this threat, the continued support from former Khmer Rouge's ally – China – was therefore crucial. As mentioned earlier, the reintegration of Khmer Rouge soldiers into the society was assisted and coordinated by the Chinese.[80] Therefore, the CPP was eager to seek Chinese political support in order to undercut the greatest security threat to peace and stability in Cambodia. With the help from Beijing, the final wave of defection of Khieu Sampan and Nuon Chea took place in December 1998, which resulted in the demise of the Khmer Rouge as a guerrilla movement.[81] The ruling CPP credited the complete collapse of the Khmer Rouge to Hun Sen's 'Win-Win Strategy' and has called it the party's historic achievement in the maintenance of Cambodia's peace and stability.

Strategically, China's support has allowed Hun Sen to "offset the traditionally strong influence of Vietnam and Thailand."[82] A weak and vulnerable Cambodia has always viewed China as a more benign power compared to its historically predatory neighbouring countries. On top of that, China has historically played the crucial role of "cushioning Cambodia against Vietnamese pressure on the east and Thai pressure on the west."[83] To the east, it is believed that Hun Sen wanted to use China as a countervailing force to the dominant influence of Hanoi in Cambodia and within his ruling CCP. Although Vietnamese troops were withdrawn by 1989, the Vietnamese influence within the CPP remained strong due to cordial relations between Vietnamese leaders and CPP key players. Some Vietnamese, who continued to remain in Cambodia, had an important role in the country's political and security apparatus.[84] To the west, Thailand not only offered hospitality to some Khmer Rouge leaders but also allowed the transit of the Khmer Rouge's weapons in order to attack the government in Phnom Penh throughout the 1980s and even in the early 1990s.[85] In fact, following the cessation of Chinese aid after the Paris Peace Agreements, it was reported that the Khmer Rouge began selling timber and gems through Thai military contacts on the border, earning around USD1 million per month.[86] The Khmer Rouge could survive and continued their resistance against Phnom Penh's armed forces primarily thanks to this business. Therefore, Phnom Penh might have been frustrated because of Khmer Rouge-Thai military relations. The historical animosity and mistrust between the Khmer and the Thai further fuelled Phnom Penh's frustration and turned it into a serious security concern.

Finally, due to high expectations on the roles of ASEAN in Cambodia's security and economic prosperity, the regional grouping's decision to suspend Cambodia' membership in the aftermath of the July 1997 violent crisis was a blow for Hun Sen and his key foreign policy advisors. In this regard, Phnom Penh believed that Cambodia's close ties with China might provide a necessary leverage to assist Cambodia's quest for ASEAN membership sooner rather than later. Cambodia had missed the opportunity to participate in ASEAN following its inception in August 1967 because of conflicts and isolation. Following the 1993 elections, Cambodia made overtures towards ASEAN. In July 1994, Cambodian Foreign Minister Norodom Sirivudh was invited as the guest of ASEAN's host – Singapore. He stated that "Cambodia is part of the region" and that "it should join ASEAN . . . accede to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC), and ASEAN forum's foundation."[87] Sirivudh's successor, Ung Huot, made a similar note on ASEAN:

> Cambodia has always been an integral part of Southeast Asia, and it will always be. Geopolitically speaking, Cambodia cannot and will not disengage itself from the region. It cannot afford to do so. It will, in fact, pursue a policy of open regionalism. We have no enemies but friends in this region.[88]

Cambodia's keen interest in ASEAN reflected the desire of Cambodian leaders to avoid the failure of their country's foreign policy in the past, especially the policies of the KR and the DK. They were concerned that Cambodia would be

isolated again from the region and the international community.[89] Therefore, joining ASEAN was a maximisation of its foreign policy options in the post–Cold War era, by moving away from isolation towards integration in ASEAN.[90] Moreover, Cambodia's entry into ASEAN was motivated by the belief that ASEAN would safeguard the Kingdom's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Geopolitically, Cambodia's keen interest in ASEAN could be explained by the historic fear of its stronger neighbours, Thailand and Vietnam. In the past, Cambodia utilised a balancing strategy against security threat from the two mightier neighbours. However, as discussed in the earlier chapter, this balance-of-power approach has never been successful. In this connection, Amitav Acharya argues:

> Joining ASEAN will address Cambodia's external security threats. It will remove any future prospect for the interference in the country by any neighbouring state such as Vietnam and Thailand, thereby putting to an end on of Cambodia's most serious security concerns. As members of ASEAN, both Vietnam and Cambodia will have to strictly adhere to the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of each other. . . . By joining ASEAN, Cambodia will be an equal partner with its neighbours.[91]

Diplomatically, ASEAN has been considered the cornerstone of Cambodia's foreign policy. Phnom Penh was convinced that Cambodia's membership in ASEAN would provide a new framework for its engagement with other countries, especially major powers outside the region.[92] ASEAN was considered, to some extent, a regional "diplomatic club" due to its engagement with major powers in various regional frameworks, such as the ASEAN Post-Ministerial Conference, the ARF, and the APT. Cambodian leaders seemed to be convinced by Lee Kuan Yew, who argued that ASEAN is "a rational Third Word grouping and the most dynamic region of the developing world in diplomacy."[93] Economically, Cambodia's participation in ASEAN was to spur its economic development through the promotion of trade, investment, tourism, agriculture, and infrastructure upgrading. Cambodian leaders pointed to six economic benefits that ASEAN membership would provide, which included (1) enhancing foreign investment confidence in Cambodia; (2) providing economies of scale with its combined population of about a half billion; (3) performing as a fast-growing economic grouping and a high-speed train for the regional economy; (4) being an important economic gateway to the global economy; (5) acting as a training ground for Cambodia's membership in the World Trade Organization (WTO); and (6) stimulating Cambodia's domestic economic reforms.[94]

Equally importantly, Cambodia's participation in the ASEAN process was also indispensable for Phnom Penh to promote its legitimacy in the eyes of the international community. In fact, international recognition is preconditional for foreign aid that Cambodia heavily depended on. In this respect, Myanmar had shown Cambodia the entry road into ASEAN. Robert Cribb argued, which was also shared by the former ASEAN Secretary-General Rodolfo Severino, that Myanmar was admitted due to the fear in many ASEAN members that "Burma might

fall into China's orbit if it were excluded."[95] According to Philippine Foreign Secretary Domingo Siazon, ASEAN's relationship with Burma was not only about the "single dominion of human rights" but, more importantly, about "strategic implications."[96] Using this logic, Phnom Penh was convinced that Cambodia's closer ties with Beijing might create a necessary pressure for ASEAN to admit the country sooner rather later.

The strengthening of Cambodia-China ties

Due to the increasing importance of Cambodia in China's foreign policy towards Southeast Asia, China continued to exert its influence on the Kingdom via the extension of its economic and political support to the Cambodian government. For its part, Phnom Penh moved quickly to gain China's trust by the establishment of the bona fide relations between the CPP and Beijing. To this end, Phnom Penh had to comply with several Chinese silent demands, including the upholding of the 'one China policy' and protection of Chinese interests in Cambodia as well as the support for China's positions on regional and global issues.

China's increasing exertion of influence in Cambodia

Former Australian Ambassador to Cambodia Tony Kevin notes that one specific difference that sets Cambodia apart from the rest of the region is the fact that "in Cambodia there has been a high degree of foreign interventionism extending over at least the past three decades, while most other Southeast Asian countries were independently shaping their own societies."[97] Therefore, he concludes that the pattern of interventionism has created a political mindset and habit among some Cambodian politicians, particularly the opposition parties, to look to the outside world, most of the time the West, rather than to their own fellow Cambodians for solutions to their problems.[98] In this context, in the eyes of leaders in Phnom Penh, China continued to be a necessary buffer against external influence, especially Western pressure, on Cambodian politics. Andrew Cock argues that for leaders in Phnom Penh, strengthening ties with Beijing offered opportunities to reshape the "space within which to navigate and deflect pressures from reform-promoting external actors."[99] Moreover, Beijing continued to persuade Phnom Penh to believe that China could cushion Cambodia against security threats from its neighbours. For instance, in 2003, after the anti-Thai riots in Phnom Penh, which led to the burning of the Royal Thai Embassy, tensions between the two neighbours almost escalated into military confrontation. China assumed the role of a broker through a statement by the Chinese Ambassador to Cambodia, asking Cambodia and Thailand to cool down tensions.[100] Then Chinese Vice-Foreign Minister Wang Yi summoned the Cambodian and Thai ambassadors in Beijing to settle the diplomatic row. He suggested that a way should be found to resolve the grievances between the two countries and warned that the two neighbours should normalise relations as soon as possible, or risk angering China.[101] This Chinese gesture gradually convinced Phnom Penh of the growing importance of China in Cambodia's quest for security.

After Hun Sen consolidated power in July 1997, China started to strengthen its security ties with Phnom Penh. Cambodia bought USD2.8 million worth of military equipment from China in the immediate aftermath of the July 1997 crisis. Cambodian military officers also undertook educational and training courses in China. China paid particular attention to the development of Cambodia's naval capabilities by delivering 15 naval patrol boats to the Royal Cambodian Navy in 2005, financed through soft loans.[102] In 2007, nine patrol boats valued at USD60 million were handed over to the Cambodian naval force, based at the Ream Naval Base. China also financed the upgrade of the Ream Military Base, which gave rise to speculation that "the base might one day constitute a 'pearl' in the string of pearls' strategy by which China allegedly seeks access to overseas naval facilities so it can better protect the country's long sea lines of communication from Africa and the Middle East."[103]

Economically, China's influence in Cambodia continued to grow. In the first nine months of 2005, China pledged USD442 million in investments, up from USD80 million in 2004, while bilateral trade increased 50 per cent in 2005.[104] As of 2008, China's investment in Cambodia reached USD4.3 billion, almost 40 per cent of total foreign investment received by Cambodia.[105] In December 2007, China joined the Cambodia Development Cooperation Forum (CDCF), which gathered all the countries and international agencies providing assistance to Cambodia, and immediately became the largest donor. At the CDCF meeting in December 2008, China committed a package worth USD257 million out of a total of USD951.5 million. It is worth mentioning that Beijing cleverly chose the right timing to make announcements related to its pledge to provide assistance to Cambodia, mostly during high-profile visits of the leaders of the two countries. For instance, in 2002, visiting Chinese Premier Zhu Ronji announced that Beijing would cancel all Cambodian debts. Similarly, during Hun Sen's visit to China in 2005, the Chinese leaders pledged USD400 million in investments, grants, and loans. In April 2006, during his meetings with Prime Minister Hun Sen in Phnom Penh, Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao pledged USD600 million in financial support to the Kingdom, and the two Prime Ministers decided to upgrade Cambodia-China bilateral ties to a "Comprehensive Partnership of Cooperation."[106]

Phnom Penh's accommodation of China's interests

The condemnation of Hun Sen's takeover of power in July 1997 as a coup and the suspension of assistance to Cambodia by the US and other Western powers presented Beijing with the opportunity to demonstrate that China was a "real friend" of Cambodia.[107] However, in order to get much-needed assistance and investment from China, Phnom Penh had to take into serious consideration China's interests and positions on various issues. First, Phnom Penh began to undertake concrete steps to uphold the 'one China policy.' On 23 July 1997, claiming that the FUNCINPEC had received covert support from Taiwan, Hun Sen closed down the Taiwan Economic and Cultural Representative Office in Phnom Penh and expelled all Taiwanese diplomats.[108] In the following years, Phnom Penh

maintained Cambodia's firm support for the 'one-China policy' and played down the presence of Taiwanese investment in the country.[109] In July 1999, Phnom Penh signed and disseminated a report detailing Cambodia's adherence to the 'one-China policy' and issued a government decree prohibiting any anti-China activities in Cambodia.[110] In 2002, the Cambodian authorities deported Chinese members of Falun Gong who were under the protection of the UN High Commissioner of Refugees back to China and banned the Dalai Lama from attending the Third World Buddhist Summit in Cambodia.[111] Moreover, the Cambodian government was also a vocal supporter of China's 2005 anti-secession law that Hun Sen described as "highly necessary for the cause of China's national reunification."[112] Since 2006, the Cambodian Ministry of Interior has acted upon a regulation by which any Taiwanese citizen wishing to marry a Cambodian citizen needs to have his/her identity certified by the PRC Embassy in Phnom Penh.[113]

Second, Phnom Penh began to accommodate China's interests in Cambodia. Culturally, the surge of Chinese-language schools and the revival of the Chinese community in Cambodia took place dramatically in 1998 and 1999, mainly due to growing assistance and encouragement from the Chinese government. Immediately after the July 1997 armed clashes, Chinese schools opened up with the assistance of the Chinese Embassy in Phnom Penh in many forms, including grants, teacher training, visits to China, curriculum development, and technical visits from China, as well as funding the re-purchasing of the former schools which had been confiscated by previous regimes in Phnom Penh. From 13 Chinese schools operating in Cambodia in 1995, the number reached over 60 by 1999.[114] According to Paul Marks, the Chinese government played an important role in providing partial funding for school construction, influencing the Cambodian government to return Chinese schools that had been confiscated, producing textbooks, conducting inspection visits, and funding participation in conferences on Chinese-language teaching in China and other Asian countries.[115] Moreover, Chinese cultural influence grew with the support of Chinese-language newspapers. By the early 2000s, the number of Chinese-language newspapers in Phnom Penh had returned to four, as it was in the 1960s.[116] The Cambodian government also opened its door to accept growing Chinese investment in the Kingdom, which tripled from 1997 to 1998.[117] In 1999, Chinese investment in Cambodia increased by 40 per cent, making China one of the largest sources of FDI inflow in the Kingdom.[118] Chinese enterprises have been highly dependent on the Chinese-Cambodian community for their investment in Cambodia, which increased both the economic and the political status of Chinese-Cambodians through which China could "leverage the economic instrument of national power."[119] This Chinese-Cambodian business community has increasingly become a strong lobby group on Cambodia's foreign policy, particularly its policy towards China.

Phnom Penh also attempted to please Beijing over the Khmer Rouge tribunal. The UN and the Cambodian government began negotiations on the formation of the Khmer Rouge tribunal in August 1999 to sentence former Khmer Rouge top leaders.[120] It was reported that China applied significant pressure on Phnom Penh related to this issue, partly because of Beijing's concern that the tribunal might

damage its reputation due to its support for the Khmer Rouge during and after its reign of terror in Cambodia from 1975 to 1979. According to Nayan Chanda, Chinese diplomats in Phnom Penh attempted on several occasions to "block the passage of legislation by the Cambodian National Assembly to establish a tribunal to try leaders of the former Khmer Rouge regime in meetings with senior Cambodian leaders."[121] Prime Minister Hun Sen has stated that "as far as his relationship with China was concerned, there is one taboo and that is we never bring up for discussion the topic of the Khmer Rouge."[122]

Third, China's economic clout in Cambodia also translated into political power, whereby Phnom Penh has allegedly been pressured to support Beijing's positions on regional and international issues. For instance, following the NATO air strike on the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade in March 1999, Hun Sen immediately condemned the attack. Similarly, in April 2001, Phnom Penh offered its strong support to the Chinese government over the collision between a US EP-3 surveillance aircraft and a Chinese fighter jet close to China's island province of Hainan.[123] More interestingly, China's emergence as a major aid provider and political supporter of the Hun Sen regime has also given new clout to the Chinese community in Cambodia and thus encouraged them to openly support Beijing's foreign policy objectives. The Cambodia-Chinese association was allowed to organise demonstrations outside the US Embassy in Phnom Penh in protest against the attack, while the leaders of the Cambodia-Chinese General Assembly also condemned the US over the EP-3 reconnaissance plane incident.[124] Phnom Penh also became more accommodating of China's interests in the region. After joining ASEAN in April 1999, the regional grouping became the bedrock of Cambodia's foreign policy. However, Phnom Penh seemed to increasingly stress its relations with China since the early 2000s. Former Singapore Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew suggested that "everything that was discussed at ASEAN meetings would be immediately known in Beijing because of China's close links with Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos."[125] More noticeably, Cambodia even withdrew its support for Japan's bid to become a member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) in 2005, allegedly due to pressure from the Chinese government.[126] This marked an important milestone of Cambodia's relations with China due to the fact that Japan had been playing a crucially important role in the peacekeeping and post-conflict peace-building processes in the Kingdom. In addition, the Cambodian government has also chosen to play down the negative environmental impact of Chinese dam construction along the upper part of the Mekong so as not to offend Beijing. These are the indications that Phnom Penh has increasingly accommodated China's interests in Cambodia and supported Beijing's positions on sensitive regional and international issues.

Constraints on China's Cambodia strategy

Phnom Penh's shift in foreign policy direction towards China was a by-product of the violent clashes between the CPP and FUNCINPEC loyalists on 5–6 July 1997. Since then, China has been pivotal to Phnom Penh's strategies to address the threats from the Khmer Rouge remnants and to buffer Cambodia's long-standing

security challenges from Thailand and Vietnam. Beijing has been also crucial for Phnom Penh to potentially tame Western pressure on various issues, including human rights, the rule of law, and democracy in Cambodia. As a result, since the establishment of a new government in 1998, Hun Sen seemed to charter a foreign policy aimed at finding a delicate balance in relations with Cambodia's neighbours and outside major powers as well as at maximising interests from the ASEAN integration. This foreign policy approach was believed to promote Cambodian national interests as well as those of the ruling elite. As far as its relations with Beijing are concerned, Phnom Penh seemed to have reservations regarding Cambodia's alignment with China due to (1) its close friendship with Hanoi, (2) its confidence in the roles of ASEAN, and (3) the importance of Western donors for Cambodia. During this period, although China emerged as an important partner for Cambodia, moving too close towards Beijing might be too risky for Prime Minister Hun Sen and his ruling CPP as it would alienate Hanoi, ASEAN, and Western donors.

The CPP's close ties with Hanoi

Obviously, Vietnamese support had all along been crucial to the collapse of the Khmer Rouge regime in January 1979 and the establishment of a new regime in Cambodia – the PRK. Hanoi's continued support was imperative to ensure the survival of the regime throughout the 1980s and to promote the power consolidation of Prime Minister Hun Sen in the aftermath of the UNTAC-organised election in 1993.[127] Therefore, Prime Minister Hun Sen and his ruling CPP have always attached importance to Cambodia's relations with Vietnam. In this regard, Ian Storey argues that "as an immediate neighbour, Hun Sen has to keep Vietnam happy for a simple reason that it was Hanoi that put him in power."[128] He also claims that Hun Sen's friendship with Hanoi would enable him to "play China and Vietnam off against each other."[129] It is true that Hun Sen and his ruling party were indebted to Vietnam for the CPP rise to power and that the CPP's ruling in Cambodia for more than a decade was possible due to Vietnamese support and protection from 1979 to 1993. Thereafter, the CPP continued to benefit from Hanoi's assistance and cooperation. For instance, after the July 1997 military violence, unlike Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand, Vietnamese leaders did not condemn the crisis but instead expressed their appreciation for Hun Sen's "contribution to the consolidation of the friendship and cooperative relations between the two states" and stated that Vietnam "would like to see Cambodia enjoy peace and stability."[130]

In 1998, the CPP won the general election with accusations of "illegality, coercion, and frauds" from the opposition parties.[131] US lawmakers condemned the outcomes of the election, claiming that the election was not free and fair.[132] Noticeably, Congressman of California Dana Rohrabacher blasted Hun Sen, calling him a "communist dictator" and a "war criminal."[133] In this context, political support from foreign countries was crucial for Phnom Penh. Vietnam, along with China, was among the first countries to call the election as being free and fair.[134] As of the late 1990s, Hanoi's influence on Cambodia's foreign policy remained significant in relation to Cambodia's membership in ASEAN. It was reported that, at

the 6th ASEAN Summit in December 1998, Vietnam was the strongest supporter of Cambodia's entry into the regional grouping.[135] At a press briefing after the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting on 12 December 1998, Vietnamese Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Nguyen Manh Cam reiterated that "Vietnam's preference for the immediate admission of Cambodia into ASEAN."[136] Hanoi's statement was in contrast with the position of other ASEAN member states, including Singapore, Thailand, and the Philippines, that had earlier made public statements expressing their reservations on the membership of Cambodia. Interestingly, Vietnam benefited from Cambodia-Thailand tense relations, particularly after the outbreak of the anti-Thai riots in Phnom Penh in January 2003 as a response to comments allegedly made by a Thai movie star that Angkor Wat belongs to the Thai and it should be returned to Thailand.[137] The riots led to the storming of the Thai embassy and the destruction of numerous Thai businesses in Phnom Penh. In the aftermath of the riots, Thai products and cultural shows were boycotted and banned. Consequently, political and trade relations between Cambodia and Vietnam were promoted as Hanoi took advantage of the Cambodia-Thailand diplomatic row to win back its influence in a post-1997 Cambodia, through not only the strengthening of political cooperation but also the promotion of economic initiatives in Cambodia.

The consolidation of the CPP's rule in the aftermath of its landslide election victory in 2004 set the stage for Cambodia and Vietnam to take their bilateral relations to the next level. Phnom Penh and Hanoi ushered in a period of sustained high-level interaction that broadened and deepened Cambodia-Vietnam bilateral relations. A major turning point came in 2005 when Cambodia and Vietnam adopted the expression of "good neighbourliness, traditional friendship, comprehensive and long-term cooperation" as the framework for their bilateral relations.[138] Cambodia and Vietnam signed a "Supplementary Border Treaty on the Delimitation of the State Border of 1985" in Hanoi on 10 October 2005.[139] The Supplementary Border Treaty laid the foundation for Cambodia and Vietnam to promote the development of Special Economic Zones along the Cambodia-Vietnam border. In 2006, Cambodia-Vietnam trade ties increased to USD950 million.[140] As of 2007, Cambodia had licensed six Special Economic Zones (SEZs), including a special zone for agricultural processing valued at USD100 million.[141] The two-way trade grew remarkably from USD184 million in 2001 to USD940 million in 2006, making Vietnam Cambodia's third-largest trading partner within ASEAN.[142] Vietnam was also Cambodia's tenth-largest foreign investor, with total investment of USD114 million in 2007.[143]

The importance of Western aid and markets

In the aftermath of the new millennium, Cambodia experienced high economic growth, with spectacular annual GDP growth rates – 13 per cent in 2005, 10.8 per cent in 2006, and 10.1 per cent in 2007.[144] However, Cambodia remained one of the world's most heavily aid-dependent countries. After the UN-organised election in 1993 that cost approximately USD1.5 billion, Cambodia received approximately

USD5 billion in official development assistance (ODA), turning the Kingdom into one of the most aid-dependent countries in the world, with net ODA received equivalent to 94.3 per cent of central government spending between 2002 and 2010.[145] ODA inflow in Cambodia increased steadily since 2001 and was slightly above the average ODA per capita for all least-developed countries from 2003 to 2005.[146] Although Chinese aid had remarkably increased since the late 1990s, it remained modest compared to the support and assistance from key West donors. Traditionally, Cambodia's major development partners have been members of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) for Cambodia, such as Japan, the US, the EU, Sweden, the UK, as well as multilateral agencies, including UN agencies, the World Bank, and the ADB. From 1998 to 2007, about two-thirds of all ODA inflow in Cambodia was disbursed by Japan, ADB, UN agencies, the World Bank, the US, and the EU.[147] In 2006, net ODA Cambodia received from the DAC members amounted to USD529 million and accounted for about 75 per cent of the total foreign aid to Cambodia.[148]

Equally importantly, Western markets have been important for Cambodia's exports, particularly its garment and footwear products – an industry that has been one of the driving forces of the country's economic growth. As of 2004, the garment industry dominated Cambodia's manufacturing, which made up for 75 per cent of value-added in manufacturing and 17 per cent of all economic activities of the country.[149] Garments are the single most important category of exports, accounting for about 80 per cent of the total value of exported products to overseas markets.[150] In 2006, manufacturing garment exports increased by 20 per cent, providing around 334,000 new jobs for the Cambodians.[151] The biggest markets for Cambodia's garment industries were the US, the EU, Canada, and Japan, which accounted for almost all exports from the Kingdom.

All things considered, since Cambodia remained dependent on Western aid and markets, Phnom Penh could not ignore interests and pressure from Western countries despite the fact that Prime Minister Hun Sen repeatedly blasted the West for interfering into Cambodia's domestic affairs through foreign assistance, while he praised Chinese aid for not having 'strings-attached.' Therefore, during the course of 1997–2008, it can be argued that Phnom Penh's foreign policy towards Beijing was to hedge for alternative sources of economic assistance and political support and at the same time cushion Western pressure for the promotion of democracy, the rule of law, and human rights in Cambodia.

Phnom Penh's high expectations of ASEAN

Initially, Cambodian leaders strongly believed in ASEAN's role in maintaining regional peace and stability and economic prosperity. Economically, Phnom Penh was convinced that Cambodia would take advantage of an economically integrated Southeast Asia as well as the free trade agreements that ASEAN had been negotiating with its partners, including China and India, Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand, and the EU. This would open up not only new markets but also investment opportunities and tourism attraction for Cambodia.

Moreover, Phnom Penh hoped to benefit from the Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI), which was launched in 2000 with the objective of narrowing the development gap between the old and the new ASEAN member states.[152] Besides economic opportunities, Cambodia's entry into ASEAN also provided an opportunity for the Kingdom to retain leverage in regional and global affairs that the country had lost due to conflicts and isolation over the last 30 years. It was believed that ASEAN would be a useful regional forum in which Cambodia's sovereignty and territorial integrity can be secured. In an interview with a local newspaper, Dr. Kao Kim Hourn, a senior foreign policy official, argued that "Cambodia now plays a regional role in ensuring the territorial integrity of the grouping and her voice is heard as it contributes to the creation of consensus among the 27 participating member states."[153] He also suggested that membership of ASEAN amplified Cambodia's diplomatic voice across the globe, as having established a high profile in ASEAN would enable Cambodia to interact with a world of friendly nations, including the US, Russia, China, Japan, and the EU. Due to the importance of ASEAN, Kao Kim Hourn articulated Cambodia's commitment that

> the integration of ASEAN is a priority for us and we will continue in these efforts with other member nations and partners until we have created a group of proud, independent nations unified by economic parity and shared financial objectives.[154]

Similarly, in his speech after Cambodia was admitted in ASEAN, Prime Minister Hun Sen stated:

> ASEAN has established security, peaceful and stable environment in the region, which are helping to boost economic growth. Peace and stability can be achieved through a framework of effective cooperation and consultation based on the principles of the 1967 Bangkok Declaration, especially the principles of non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries. Cambodia believes that this principle is an excellent rule with which relationship and disputes with the circle of ASEAN can be strengthened and resolved.[155]

In this context, Cambodia tried to follow a balanced line between strengthening its ties with China for economic and political support, and promoting ASEAN's integration and its role in the region. During this period, Cambodia adopted a hedging strategy as it attempted to avoid taking a clear position or side on issues on which ASEAN and China were at odds. The most illustrating case was Cambodia's position on the South China Sea throughout the 2000s, which was seen as in line with the common position of ASEAN.[156] In fact, Cambodia as the Chair of ASEAN in 2002 played an important role in coordinating and facilitating contacts between ASEAN member states and China that resulted in the adoption of the Declaration of the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC) at the 8th ASEAN Summit in Phnom Penh on 4 November 2002.

Conclusion

Throughout the course of 1997–2008, Hun Sen maintained a delicate balanced foreign policy towards China, Vietnam, and key Western donors including Japan, as well as ASEAN. Phnom Penh's strategic direction during that time can be broadly categorised as a hedging strategy as Cambodian leaders did not adopt any particularly clear strategic option. Despite China's growing influence in Cambodia, Phnom Penh's relations with Beijing were part of its hedging strategy to maximise benefits from all key partners. Due to Cambodia's strategic location, China continued to pay much attention to the Kingdom following the UNTAC-organised election in 1993. Beijing moved quickly to strengthen its ties with the newly established coalition government between the FUNCINPEC and the CPP. Noticeably, Chinese leaders began to cultivate their ties with their former foes, Hun Sen and other leaders of the CPP, for the simple reason that the CPP had played a dominant role in Cambodian politics. Beijing also encouraged Hun Sen to be more independent from Hanoi. However, Hun Sen remained sceptical about Beijing's intentions due to China's support to the Khmer Rouge in the past and its close ties with the royalists.

Interestingly, Cambodia-China relationship experienced a remarkable transformation following the military violence between the CPP and the FUNCINPEC in Phnom Penh on 5–6 July 1997. The strengthening of the relationship resulted from political and strategic convergence between Phnom Penh and Beijing. China had become an important source of financial and political support, as well as security protection for the Hun Sen regime from Western pressure on sensitive issues in Cambodia, including human rights, the rule of law, and democracy. Furthermore, it was believed that Hun Sen wanted to use China's influence to curtail the dominant influence of Hanoi in Cambodia and within the ruling CPP. More importantly, Phnom Penh was frustrated by Khmer Rouge-Thai close military ties throughout the 1990s. The history of animosity between the Khmer and the Thai exacerbated Phnom Penh's frustration and turned it into a serious security concern. In this respect, China could protect Cambodia against this long-standing rival.

In return, Cambodia could help China realise its economic, diplomatic, and strategic interests in Southeast Asia. As a result, China continued to exert its influence in Cambodia through the extension of its economic and political support to Cambodia. In response, Hun Sen became increasingly receptive to China's growing influence in Cambodia by upholding the 'one-China policy' and protecting Chinese interests and supporting China's positions in the region and beyond. However, China's Cambodia foreign policy faced constraints and challenges due to Phnom Penh's concerns that Cambodia's close relations with China would alienate Hanoi, ASEAN, and Western donors, which remained crucial for Cambodia's economic development and security.

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4 Revived threats from bigger neighbours

Cambodia's increasing alignment with China since 2008

Cambodia's strategic direction evolved towards an alignment with China in the late 2000s. This shift was primarily driven by Phnom Penh's perception of growing security threats from Cambodia's historically predatory neighbours – Thailand and Vietnam. The eruption of the Cambodia-Thailand border conflict from 2008 to 2011 reminded Cambodian leaders that their more powerful neighbour(s) remained a threat to Cambodia's security and territorial integrity. The conflict also further exacerbated the already negative acuteness of the Cambodian population towards their neighbours to the west. Equally importantly, Cambodia's ties with its neighbour to the east, Vietnam, have also been increasingly problematic due to historical antagonism, border disputes and illegal Vietnamese migration in Cambodia. Noticeably, Cambodia's alleged support for China's position on the South China Sea at the expense of Vietnam's claim has also been a source of Phnom Penh-Hanoi tense relations, particularly in the aftermath of the failure of the ASEAN Foreign Ministers to issue a joint communiqué during their meeting in Phnom Penh in July 2012.

It can be argued that Cambodia does not want to antagonise its neighbours by aligning itself with China. However, given the re-emergence of perceived security threats from its neighbours and the ineffectiveness of ASEAN's response to the security need of Cambodia, Phnom Penh's alignment with China is an important option to prepare for the worst-case scenario of the more aggressive behaviour from its neighbours. Obviously, Hun Sen's traditional ally, Hanoi, lacks China's financial largesse and diplomatic clout. More importantly, close ties with Vietnam have become a real political liability that the domestic opposition is keen to exploit.

Cambodia's mistrust of Thailand

Cambodia's mistrust towards its bigger neighbours has been in the DNA of the Cambodians since ancient time. Cambodia's suspicion and sometimes fear towards its neighbour to the west, Thailand, can be traced back to the Angkor period, as discussed in Chapter 2. Oddly, Cambodia and Thailand are two neighbours in Southeast Asia that share many similar aspects of culture, traditions and religious practices. Yet mutual mistrust and even hatred have been a norm rather

an exception in the relations between the two peoples. A Thai historian Charnvit Kasetsiri perfectly captures the nature of Cambodia-Thailand relations as follows:

> Among the neighbouring countries of Southeast Asia, none seems more similar to Thailand than Cambodia (perhaps not even excluding Laos and the "Tai" people scattered throughout such countries as Burma, Vietnam, and southern China). Both nations share similar customs, traditions, beliefs, and ways of life. This is especially true of royal customs, language, writing systems, vocabulary, literature and the dramatic arts. In list of these similarities, it seems surprising, therefore, that relations between Thailand and Cambodia should be characterised by deep-seated ignorance, misunderstanding, and prejudice. Indeed, the two countries have what can be termed "a love-hate relationship".[1]

The love-hate relationship between Cambodia and Thailand has significantly suffered from historical embeddedness, negative perceptions between the two peoples, and their quest for cultural identity and superiority. The eruption of the Cambodia-Thailand border conflict from 2008 to 2011 has further exacerbated mistrust with the two neighbouring nations and revived the residue of suspicion of Cambodian foreign policymakers towards their western neighbours.

Thailand's 'lost territory' discourse: implications for Cambodia

Historically, the Khmer and the Thai had interacted through cultural exchange, trade, and marriage predating the first Thai kingdom of Sukhothai, which was founded in 1238.[2] According to Pavin Chachavalpongpun, from the period of Sukhothai to the rise of Ayutthaya – another Thai kingdom founded in 1351 – the Thai looked up to their Khmer neighbours and embraced their advanced civilisation.[3] He also notices that "successive Thai Kings were filled with tremendous admiration for anything Khmer, ranging from art, architecture, language and royal rituals."[4] However, the Khmer Empire gradually declined and eventually collapsed in 1431 following the invasion by the Siamese army, which transformed the Empire into a vulnerable state. As the Vietnamese expanded their influence southwards, Khmer Kings attempted to play one rivalry neighbour against the other. With the advent of colonialism in mainland Southeast Asia, King Norodom of Cambodia (1860–1904) accepted the French protectorate in 1863 to ensure the survival against its two predatory neighbouring countries.

The arrival of the Europeans in mainland Southeast Asia marked an end to Thai predominance in the region and hence affected its monarchy as an institution. To maintain the central role of the monarchy, the history of Thailand has been written and rewritten in order to promote the image of Thai Kings as the founders and protectors of the nation. For instance, the writings of Prince Damrong, younger brother of King Chulalongkorn, focused on the monarchy as the predominant actor in Thai history that connected "the modern Kingdom back through Ayutthaya to the golden age of Sukothai."[5] This narrative suggests:

> Thai Kings are the fathers of the nation that brought progress to the country and guarded it against all enemies, allowing Siam to enter the twentieth century as a proud, independent nation that has never been colonized by Western powers.[6]

Basically, this narrative portrayed Siam as an exceptional kingdom where the monarch gave birth to the nation, limited Western influence, and formulated a unique path towards modernity. However, following the 1932 coup d'état that ended the absolute monarchy in Thailand, the military regime of Field Marshal Plaek Phibun Songkhram (1938–1944) charted a new national discourse by creating a new sense of historical memory of the Thai.

By using "national humiliation" and the "lost territories" discourse, the military regime hoped to promote its legitimacy and mobilise support for the "stated goal of reducing Western interference" in the country's affairs.[7] This new discourse divided modern Thai history into two parts. First, the arrival of Western imperialism in Southeast Asia caused the gradual decline of Thai prestige and erosion of Thai sovereignty. The narrative claimed that the 1855 Bowring Treaty with the British marked the beginning of Siam's gradual descent from a "regional empire" towards "European client-state" as Siam had to give away the right to set duties on imports and granted the Europeans exemption from its laws.[8] Second, and more importantly, the 1893 defeat following the French naval blockage of the Chao Phrya River, known to the Thai as the Pak Nam crisis, was a grave humiliation as Siam was forced to renounce its claim to the left bank of the Mekong, including Cambodia and Laos – a region that comprised almost one-third of the Kingdom's total territory.[9] Therefore, with the loss of Laos and Cambodia to French Indochina, these countries became known as the 'lost territories,' a powerful symbol of Siam's diminished status and thus the national humiliation.[10] As part of its irredentist foreign policy, the Phibun government produced a map identifying areas of French Indochina as had once been parts of Thailand, while Phibun's chief ideologue, Wichit Wathakhan, compared these territories to "limbs that had been amputated from the body of the nation."[11] The military junta also promoted the concept of the 'unfair treaties' with France as an explanation for the loss of its territories to the Khmer.[12] Obviously, those treaties worked more to the advantage of Cambodia, which could be later considered by the Cambodians as a legal foundation for the recovery of their territories, which had been lost to the Thai. The treaties and conventions that have been highlighted include:[13]

- The Franco-Siamese Treaty on 14 April 1865: Siam recognised the French protectorate over Cambodia (Article 1)
- The Franco-Siamese Treaty on 3 October 1893: Siam renounced all its claims to the whole of the territories in Cambodia on the left bank of the Mekong (Article 1)
- The Franco-Siamese Treaty on 13 February 1904: Siam returned the provinces of Melouprey, Tunle Lapov and Trat to Cambodia and the Siamese

government also gave up military positions and control in the provinces of Battambang, Siemreap and Sisophon

- The Franco-Siamese Treaty on 23 March 1907: Siam ceded three provinces of Battambang, Siem Reap, and Sisophon to French Indochina in exchange for Dansai district and Trat province with all the islands situated to the south of Lem Ling in Thailand.

In 1941, after months of publicly demanding that France must return the lost territories, Thailand – with the support of Japan – invaded French Indochina. The 1941 Tokyo Peace Accord was signed to end the border conflict, which allowed Thailand to retake possession of most of what the Thai called *Monthon Burapha* – Cambodian provinces of Sisophon, Siem Reap, and Battambang. In the negotiations, the Thai government even attempted to include Angkor Wat in the settlement, but it could not win the concession from Japan, which was the mediator of the treaty.[14] Consequently, the Phibun government launched a press campaign to publicise the beauty of Preah Vihear in order to divert the public attention from its failure to retake Angkor Wat.[15] In fact, prior to the twentieth century, the Bangkok elite demonstrated a strong interest in historical preservation and the cultural value of temple ruins in Cambodia, with a primary focus on the Angkor complex. According to Strate, they were probably not even aware of the existence of Preah Vihear, given the temple's remote location in the Dangrek Mountains.[16] Following Japan's surrender in 1945, Thailand was forced to relinquish all territories it obtained by the 1941 Tokyo Peace Accord. As a member of the UNSC, France demanded that Thailand must return the territories it obtained during the war with French Indochina before it could be admitted to the UN. The 1946 Washington Accord re-established the Cambodia-Thailand border set forth in the 1907 Franco-Siamese Treaty. In this regard, the Thai memory of the lost territories continued to be manipulated by the ruling elite and thus haunt the nation. In 1953, the Thai government, once again led by military strongman Phibun Songkhram, renewed its irredentist claims by embarking on a campaign to recover the lost provinces from the French with the primary objective of legitimising the military regime.[17] Immediately upon the withdrawal of French forces from Cambodia in 1954, Thai police forces covertly established a post just north of Preah Vihear and hoisted their flag over the temple site. As its armed forces were then stationed at the temple site, Thai lawyers and commentators claimed that Preah Vihear had always been part of Thailand.[18]

The Cambodian government saw Thailand's presence at Preah Vihear as an infringement of Cambodia's national sovereignty, and advised its people that the real danger to their nation had always been Thai imperialism. For Phnom Penh, Thailand's attempted annexation of the heritage site was a contemporary reminder that the Thai were always attempting to conquer Cambodian lands and subjugate its people as they had done for centuries. As a result, Cambodia broke off its diplomatic relations with Thailand twice in 1958 and 1961, as a protest against the Thai claim for and occupation of the Preah Vihear temple. Negotiations on the status of the temple took place over the course of 1957–1958. As the bilateral negotiations

failed, the Cambodian government turned to the UN, through an appeal to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on 4 September 1958. In response to Sihanouk's narrative that Cambodia was the victim of Thai aggression, the Thai government promoted an alternative history centred on Thai sufferings at the hands of Western imperialism and on the belief that the Thai were and could become again the "masters of a mainland Southeast Asia that had existed before the arrival of the Europeans."[19] Once again, the whole nation mourned its lost territories – the three provinces ceded to Cambodia in 1946. For the Thai, *Monthon Burapha* would still belong to Thailand if France had not forced Siam to sign the unfair treaties of 1904 and 1907.[20] The narrative goes further to suggest that, unlike Thai Kings who had sacrificed territory in their weaker moments, the Thai government in the twentieth century outlasted the French and, therefore, it was only right that these lands be returned to their former sovereigns. In an interview with reporters, Prime Minister Sarit said:

> Good men had fought and died for the provinces, which Thailand later lost due to deception. . . . Even though many years have passed, we have not forgotten. . . . We still taste the bitterness although it happened yesterday.[21]

Many Thai pundits wrote columns warning Sihanouk with provocative statements such as:

> As a nation that has long been civilized we have an enormous advantage over the Khmers, which we refrain from exploiting. But if we are harmless it is not of fear. We warn Cambodia that if the tiger is asleep, do not say he is afraid. . . . It was fortunate for Cambodia that the Japanese intervened to take charge of the negotiations, otherwise the word 'Khmer' might never have been heard again.[22]

The new regime of Prime Minister Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat (1958–1963) appeared very confident that Thailand would prevail in the legal dispute due to its economic and military strength as well as political influence in the region.[23] At the ICJ in The Hague, the key legal issue of the trial on the Preah Vihear temple was the legitimacy of the Annex I map – a map that was drawn based on the 1904 and 1907 Franco-Siamese Treaties. The Cambodian delegation presented the map as the evidence that the temple was situated within the borders of French Indochina, later Cambodia, since 1907. The Cambodian legal team requested that the court instruct Thailand to withdraw its soldiers from the complex and recognise Cambodian sovereignty over the site. In response, the Thai delegation argued that the map was "solely the product of France's imagination," that it did not accurately depict the border region, and that it had never been accepted by Thailand on the ground that the "international boundary had always been the watershed of the Dangrek Mountains" as defined in the text of the 1904 Franco-Siamese Treaty.[24] Therefore, the ruins were in the territory of Thailand. Following deliberate consultation based on the legal and historical evidence, the ICJ ruled 9 to 3 recognising the Annex

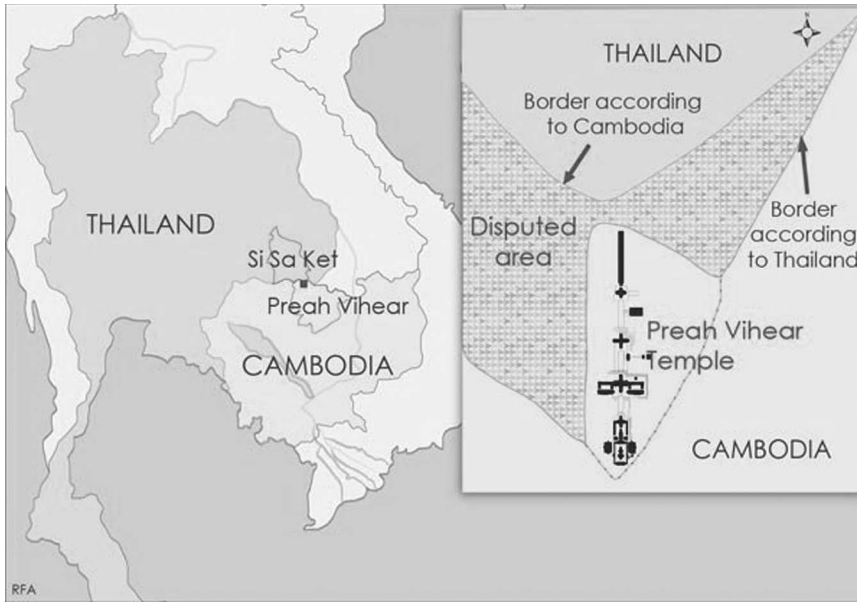
I map as the final authority on the border demarcation between Cambodia and Thailand. Therefore, the court awarded sovereignty over the site to Cambodia and instructed Thailand to remove its soldiers from Preah Vihear.[25]

The immediate reaction in Thailand to the court's ruling was disbelief and defiance. A local newspaper, *Sarn Seri*, carried a special edition on Preah Vihear with a bold headline, "Thailand Will Fight to the Death," featuring an interview with army general Praphas.[26] The general summed up the country's mood by stating that the Thai army would fight and die before it would allow another country to again steal its territory.[27] He later threatened to shoot any Cambodian who tried to enter the temple. One week after the verdict, thousands of students from five different universities staged one of the biggest demonstrations in Thailand's history in Bangkok in the hope of convincing the government to keep Preah Vihear.[28] Other demonstrations took place in 50 provinces across the country.[29] Given an intensified media and public pressure to disregard the ICJ's verdict, Prime Minister Sarit took everyone by surprise everyone when he announced in July 1962 that Thailand would comply with the court ruling. According to Strate, in spite of the irredentist sentiment, there were at least two main factors that compelled the Sarit regime to make such a decision.[30] First, despite its military advantage, Thailand did not want to provoke a conflict due to Cambodia's growing relationship with the PRC after the two Phnom Penh and Beijing signed a "Declaration of Friendship" in February 1956. Second, defying the court's ruling might jeopardise Thailand's standing, especially its membership in the UN, which was seen as an important source of its international prestige. In fact, King Bhumibol was very concerned about the dispute and had advised the government to proceed with caution. In this regard, Sarit reminded the nation:

> We are now living in a world society. Thai brethren must have been well aware of the recognition and esteem the Thai nation enjoys in the international society. Were we to lose our dignity and prestige on account of the ruins of Phra Viharn, how many more decades or centuries will be needed to restore the lost prestige?[31]

However, instead of facilitating the healing process, Thai leaders worked to keep the wound open by insisting that the dispute had not been fully resolved. They also argued that the court had awarded sovereignty of the temple site to Cambodia, but it made no ruling on the precise location of the border around it. It meant that the temple structure might belong to Cambodia, but the surrounding land remained part of Thailand (see Map 4.1). Sarit assured the people that his government had not given up an effort to reclaim what it considered to be Thai territory. He stated:

> As Thailand behaved in the world society as a member imbued with the highest sense of honour and morality, sooner or later the Temple of Phra Viharn shall revert once again to Thailand. . . . The incident of Phra Viharn will remain in the memory of the Thai people for generations to come and will leave an indelible mark on the nation's history as if it was a wound in the heart of each and everyone in the entire nation.[32]



Map 4.1 Border Claims by Cambodia and Thailand

Source: Radio Free Asia

By analysing Sarit's statement on challenging the ICJ's ruling, Strate argues that the Thai government attempted to "construct a historical narrative that associated Preah Vihear with the concept of lost territory and enabled the issue to resurface under the right circumstances."[33] Unsurprisingly, the Preah Vihear temple continues to haunt Cambodia-Thailand relations, as illustrated by the eruption of the border dispute between the two nations in 2008, which will be discussed in the following section.

The quest for cultural superiority

Due to the fact that the Khmer and the Thai share so many things in common and at the same time have gone through a bitter history of animosity, the two nations have tried to establish different narratives in their struggle for cultural superiority over one another. The Khmer tend to consider that they are the "originator" or the first people who had always occupied what is now known as Indochina and thus had owned this region at the onset.[34] Khmer narratives hold the view that the Thai were not the original people in the peninsula but new latecomers who had migrated from the southern part of China and settled down on the foundation of Khmer culture and civilisation. The majority of the Khmer believe that almost all aspects of present-day

Thailand, including its culture and arts, royal practices, and even traditional political ideas of monarchical system, have been merely a derivative of Khmer civilisation.[35] The Thai are regarded as a new race which, in their early nation-building process, were trying to create their culture and traditions by copying from Khmer civilisation.[36] The Khmer narratives also exert the linguistic claim that Thai language originates from the Khmer or even that the Thai have dishonestly transformed Khmer language into their own. In addition, the Khmer tend to argue that the Thai did not receive Pali-Sanskrit script directly from India but through the Khmer. These cultural and linguistic claims can be largely found in Cambodian folklore, literature, history textbooks, royal chronicles, and newspaper articles. They have often been advocated by different social groups, especially the ruling elite.

In contrast, Thai historical narratives in general tend to promote a cultural and historical quest for their own nationhood. By using archaeological works, along with other historical and cultural justifications, the Thai have claimed that the area of Siam is one of the oldest inhabited areas in Southeast Asia. For instance, Thai historian Sujit Wongthes posits:

> Siam was born and grew precisely where it is today rather than being traced back to the Altai Mountains or to Mongolia followed by a migration into the plains of "Huang so" and "Yang Si rivers" and the establishment of Nan Chao Kingdom which was believed to be destroyed later by the Mongol dynasty of Kublai Khan in the early 13th century.[37]

Another narrative argues that the Khmer, not the Thai, were the latecomers in the region with an attempt to reject the theory that the Khmer were the indigenous race in Indochina. It asserts that the Thai migrated into Indo-China where they lived under the suzerainty of the empire of the Mon, which was the governing race in the area, roughly from the fifth century onwards, and by the tenth century, the Khmer began to migrate into "the Thai area and eventually succeeded the Mon so that the Thai came to be ruled by the Khmer Empire."[38] Similarly, a considerable number of educated Thai and members of the ruling class had believed that it was the Khom, not the Khmer, who built the Angkor Empire.[39] However, this argument has been challenged by Khmer scholars and even some Thai historians. For instance, Charnvit Kasetsiri claims that the Khom and the Khmer are the same, explaining that the word 'Khom' is derived from a Khmer word – *Khmer Krom* – meaning 'lowland Khmer' and that in spoken Thai, the word 'Khmer' was gradually dropped, "leaving only Krom which over time became first Klom or Kalom, and eventually Khom."[40] Culturally, the Thai tend to distinguish between Thai arts and culture from those of the Khmer in order to exert their cultural identity and uniqueness. Moreover, the Thai even posit that from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century when Cambodia was under Thai control, the Khmer learned many aspects of Thai culture. Thai students have been taught that Khmer culture, including masked dance drama, originated from Thailand and is merely a duplication or emulation of Thai culture.[41]

Such quest for cultural identity also extends to claims over various other aspects of national identity, including historical places and monuments, artefacts,

classical drama, traditional music, classical dance, and martial arts. However, many modern Thai scholars and some of the ruling elite have also acknowledged that Thai culture did originate from Khmer. For instance, Prince Subhadradis Diskul, a prominent Thai archaeologist and historian, admitted that the Thai "adopted and adapted" Khmer culture.[42] Similarly, Charnvit Kasetsiri argues that the earliest royal Thai titles were derived from the Khmer, the most highly advanced civilisation in Southeast Asia at the time and a source of knowledge and inspiration to the Thai people. He goes on to suggest:

> Those elements of Thai culture which are generally considered to have originated in India, such as Buddhism, architecture, artistic designs, and even a significant portion of the Thai lexicon, did not enter Thailand directly from India. Rather, they were all second-hand transmissions, so to speak, having first passed through the Sri Lankans (including the Tamil), the Mon, or the Khmers. Even the concept of divine kingship (devaraja) and much of the special vocabulary associated with the royal court were, as M.R. Kukrit Pramoj, a noted intellectual and former Thai prime minister said, "derived from Cambodia".[43]

Still, there remain a significant number of Thai leaders and well-educated people who have attempted to exert their cultural superiority over the Khmer. To the Khmer, such an attempt is the distortion of history that should be accordingly addressed. Prior to the anti-Thai riots in Phnom Penh in 2003, many Cambodians were concerned over Thai 'economic and cultural imperialism' in Cambodia as Thai music, movies, cosmetics, fashion designs, shopping centres, soap operas, architectural styles, packaged foods, and tourism became increasingly popular in Cambodia.[44] As a result, the Cambodian authorities banned all Thai pop music and television programmes from being displayed in public in the aftermath of the riots. In fact, the Cambodians have tried to preserve and promote their culture, partly to resist Thai cultural domination. For instance, the Royal Ballet of Cambodia (*Lakhaon Preah Reachtrop*), which is similar to *Lakhon Nai* of Thailand, and the Khmer Shadow Theatre (*Lakhaon Nang Sbek Thom*), which is similar to *Lakhon Nang Yai* of Thailand, were inscribed as the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2008.[45] *Kun Khmer* (Khmer martial art), similar to Muay Thai, has been promoted so that the world knows that this martial art belongs to the Khmer. In 2017, Cambodia requested the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) to enlist the Kun Khmer of Bokator as the world intangible cultural heritage. There will definitely be heating debates between the Khmer and the Thai after the UNESCO unveils its decision on the status of Bokator as the martial art is very similar to Muay Thai. In fact, many in Cambodia share the view that the origin of Muay Thai comes from Bokator.

Negative perceptions between the Khmer and the Thai

There is a general perception in Cambodia that the Thai do look down on their neighbours, especially the Cambodians and the Laotians, who are considered

poor, unattractive and unsophisticated, and lazy. In his writing in the 1840s, Thai King Rama III suggested that "the Cambodians always fight among themselves in the matter of political succession. . . . The losers of these fights go to ask help from a large nation nearby; the winners must then ask for forces from the others."[46] Similarly, in King Mongkut's account, he depicted the Khmer as a 'half-civilized, half-barbarian' people who were tributary to the 'more civilized' race of Siam.[47] In this regard, the Khmer also believe that the writing of Thai history has been selective and thus dishonest. For instance, Patrick Jory noted that while the tale of Siam being a "ruthless destroyer of Angkor is missing in Thai textbooks, humiliating images of the Khmer are particularly highlighted to make Thai superiority apparent."[48] A dramatic example that has been highlighted is a narrative that while Ayutthaya was busy fending off an invasion from the Burmese in the west, King Setha of Cambodia attacked the Siamese in the east. In revenge, King Naresuan of Siam had the Khmer King captured and executed, then proceeded to bathe his feet in the traitor's blood.[49] It is, therefore, convenient for the Thai to conclude, based on their arbitrary and selective historical perspective, that the Khmer were cowardly opportunistic, striking only when Siam was in trouble.[50] Contemporarily, the Thai view Khmer leaders as traitors and ingrates. As Cambodia and Thailand underwent a tense relationship over the Preah Vihear temple in the early 1960s, a Thai riddle asks, "What colour (*si*) do Thai people hate?" The answer is neither *si daeng* (red) nor *si dam* (black), but "Si-hanouk."[51]

The majority of the Cambodians tend to believe that when Thai parents get angry with their children, they sometimes curse that 'You will be born as Khmer in your next life' or ask 'Were you born a Khmer?' This implies that the Khmer are bad and sinful. Such perceptions were once again seen in comments on an electronic discussion platform created by a Thai newspaper, *The Nation*, in the aftermath of the anti-Thai riots in Phnom Penh in 2003. Some comments characterised the Khmer as "undeveloped," "stone aged," "primitive," "barbaric," "deceptive," and "uncivilized."[52] Some comments went on to say that the riots happened because the Khmer were "less educated" and "inclined to violence"; they are "passively manipulated, child-like, and stupid."[53] In addition, the comments provides contrast examples that the

> Thai are gentle and calm people (unlike the "vicious" Khmer who slaughter each other), forgiving and generous (unlike the Khmer ingrates, who are insincere and cannot be trusted) and "civilized" and "developed" (unlike the backward Khmer who don't know any better).[54]

More noticeably, it was reported that Thai King Bhumibol Adulyadej spoke to a group of furious Thai protesters gathering in front of the Royal Embassy of Cambodia in Bangkok as a response to the anti-Thai riots in Phnom Penh that "Do not forget who were are. We are *phu dee* or high class."[55] The King's comment was the reaffirmation of the view that the Khmer are inferior to the 'more civilized' race of the Thai. Mutual hatred and historical embeddedness have also been kept alive, replicated and refined by some Thai politicians, the media, and even the education system.

Similarly, Khmer narratives tend to depict the Thai as the major cause of the decline and eventual collapse of the Khmer Empire as well as the most dangerous historical enemy who always intruded into Khmer territory and interfered into Khmer internal affairs. The Khmer tend to portray the Thai as aggressive, ruthless, greedy, tricky, and thieving.[56] This negative image is usually witnessed in various versions of Khmer royal chronicles, history textbooks, legends, poems, and folk songs. The perception has been intensified by Cambodia's irredentism to signify the "Khmer's self-centric historical perspective and the national pride of their past glory."[57] One of the examples is the depiction of Cambodian map during Jayavarman VII's reign prepared by the Cambodian Cultural Commission in 2008, which shows Cambodia's vast area of land covering all over the present-day Thailand, Laos, and the southern part of Vietnam.[58] Generally, the Cambodian people have been heartbroken by the loss of their territories to Thailand and are insulted by Thai arrogance and attempts to distort the past between the nations. In recent past, the entire Cambodian population were shocked by ill-treatment of Cambodian migrant workers and illegal loggers by Thai soldiers. It has been reported that Cambodian migrant workers working in Thailand are frequently subject to extortion and abuses and are denied basic legal protection by the local authorities. As of December 2014, there were nearly 200,000 documented Cambodians working in Thailand.[59] It is estimated that many more undocumented Cambodians have been working in Thailand. More seriously, Cambodian illegal loggers who crossed the border into the Thai side had to encounter inhumane crackdowns by Thai border soldiers, including extrajudicial killings. It was estimated that 45 Cambodians were killed in 2012 and 69 in 2013 while they were crossing the border to the Thai territory for illegal logging.[60] On 7 January 2015, it was reported that Thai soldiers burnt alive two Cambodians.[61] Less than a month later, Thai soldiers shot to death three Cambodians and seriously injured a fourth who crossed the border to illegally log rosewood in Thailand.[62]

Rising anger over the repeated killings of Cambodian nationals by Thailand's army has prompted calls for the Cambodian government to lodge a complaint to the International Criminal Court (ICC).[63] The killings have resulted in a rare show of unity in Cambodia between the government, opposition, and human rights groups, all slamming Thailand for its failure to put an end to the shooting of the Cambodians who cross the border illegally. Cambodia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation has sent series of strongly worded diplomatic notes to the Royal Thai Embassy in Phnom Penh in protest against the extrajudicial killings. The lawmakers of the opposition party, Cambodian National Rescue Party (CNRP), also sent letters to the Thai authorities condemning the killings.[64] Cambodian human rights groups condemned the killings and called the Thai border troops a "killing machine."[65] Obviously, the perception among the Cambodian population that the Thais are greedy, tricky, thieving, and aggressive, as well as ruthless, has shaped Cambodia-Thailand relations. Worse still, when politicians in both countries attempted to use nationalism for their political interests, the bilateral relationship suffered, just like the anti-Thai riots in 2003 and the border conflict from 2008 to 2011.

Cambodia-Thailand border conflict, 2008–2011: the revival of mistrust

Mutual mistrust between Cambodia and Thailand reached a new high in 2008 after Cambodia successfully enlisted the Preah Vihear temple as the world heritage site on 7 July 2008, with the support of the Thai government of Prime Minister Samak Sundaravej. Preah Vihear issue re-emerged, 46 years after the ICJ's ruling, to haunt Cambodia-Thailand bilateral relations. Months of growing bilateral tensions and military confrontation led to an armed conflict in early February 2011 when Thai and Cambodian troops experienced their worst clashes. Both sides resorted to a violent conflict that included gunfire and artillery duels, killing at least two Thais and eight Cambodians. More than 3,000 Thais were evacuated from a village close to where the incident took place. The temple itself was damaged by artillery fire from Thai guns.[66] The Cambodian government called the skirmishes the border war and the act of aggression of Thailand towards Cambodia's territorial integrity.

It is widely agreed, even by Thai scholars, that the conflict over the Preah Vihear temple was the by-product of the political crisis in Thailand in the aftermath of the military coup against Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra on 19 September 2006. The yellow-shirt royalists, the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD), and the opposition Democrat Party politicised the Preah Vihear issue to delegitimise and eventually remove the pro-Thaksin government of Samak Sundaravej. By arousing a sense of nationalism among the Thai in relation to the temple, they proclaimed themselves the defenders of the Thai nation and suggested that Thaksin and his cronies were willing to sacrifice Thai territories in exchange for personal benefits from their businesses in Cambodia.[67] The theme of lost territories was again propagated, this time by the anti-Thaksin forces – the PAD, the Democratic Party, and some military generals. They reminded the Thai that they have been robbed of their lands by greedy Western powers in the past and by sinister Cambodians in the present day. The PAD and the Democrat Party reinvented the image of Cambodia as Thailand's arch rival. Sondhi Limthongkul, leader of the PAD, proposed aggressive, arrogant resolutions, including the use of force to solve the border dispute. He said in public:

> A commission must be set up to invite Cambodia to bilateral negotiation. If the dispute cannot be settled, Thailand would mobilize troops to push the Cambodians back from Thai territory, and formally inform Cambodia that, a part of the Preah Vihear temple and the surroundings belong to Thailand, and that Thailand would pay any price to protect its sovereignty, even at the cost of war.[68]

While making Cambodia the enemy of the nation, some Thai political figures tried to demonise the Cambodian leaders on a personal level. For instance, in October 2008, Kasit Piromya, a senior member of the Democrat Party and later the Foreign Minister of the Abhisit Vejjajiva government (2008–2011), appeared

on a televised political talk show and insulted Prime Minister Hun Sen as the "premier gangster of Southeast Asia" who was "mentally imbalanced."[69] On another platform, Kasit was reported to have even stated that "I will use Hun Sen's blood to wash my feet." His statement reminded many Cambodians of the tragic death of King Setha and of an unforgettable past humiliation under Thai suzerainty.[70] After the Democrat Party formed a government in December 2008, Hun Sen immediately challenged Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva and his government's legitimacy by working intimately with Thaksin and his red-shirt supporters – the United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD). Diplomatic relations between the two countries were downgraded as Bangkok and Phnom Penh recalled their ambassadors respectively, following the appointment of Thaksin as an economic advisor to the Cambodian government on 4 November 2009. By exploiting the notion of national security and nationalism, the Thai military mobilised forces and built bunkers in several villages in Si Saket province near the site of Preah Vihear. The tension reached a new height on 29 December 2010, when seven PAD members including a Democratic Party lawmaker, Panich Vikitsreth, were arrested for illegally crossing into Cambodia. It was alleged that the PAD exploited this latest row with Cambodia that it had created in order to return to the "political limelight."[71] With the support from army leaders who were irritated by Abhisit's call for an election in July 2011, the PAD organised mass demonstrations to call upon Abhisit to adopt a tougher position against Cambodia. One of the organisers, Sondhi Limthongkul, publicly urged "the Thai military to seize Cambodian territory, including Angkor Wat, to barter for Preah Vihear."[72]

As the political fever in Bangkok reached its climax, Cambodia-Thailand border skirmishes exploded. In early February 2011, Cambodian and Thai troops exchanged gunfire and artillery in their worst clashes. Thereafter, the conflict was no longer confined to the Preah Vihear temple and its surrounding 4.6 square kilometre dispute area. In early May 2011, two little-known temple complexes on the Cambodian-Thai border, Ta Krabei and Ta Moan, witnessed fierce clashes between the two countries. Undoubtedly, emotions ran deep in both countries, particularly among the Thai as the discourse of "lost territories" revived nationalist forces that drove the country into deadly conflict with Cambodia.[73] PAD leaders reminded the Thai of the loss of Preah Vihear to Cambodia in 1962 and that "Thailand must not allow history to repeat itself."[74] Diplomatically, both countries managed the border tension through various bilateral negotiations based on the 2000 Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in which a Joint Border Committee (JBC) was established. However, having lost confidence in bilateral mechanisms, the Cambodian government then sought multilateral approaches to settle the dispute. There are two main reasons for Phnom Penh's shift away from the bilateral solution.[75] First, Cambodian leaders were concerned that Thailand might resort to military means to recapture Preah Vihear as the Sarit government wanted to do in the late 1950s. The Cambodian government believed that the continuous border clashes might escalate into an even bigger armed conflict affecting peace and stability between the two countries and the region as a whole. Second, Cambodian leaders were frustrated with the Abhisit administration in the handling of the issue

due to its inconsistent positions and dishonesty. They perceived that the temple fell hostage to Thai domestic politics, particularly because of direct pressure from the PAD on the government. As a result, citing "an eminent state of war," the Cambodian government quickly sought international support from ASEAN and the UN. The appeals for ASEAN's help were raised from time to time but were declined as Thailand objected. When violent border clashes intensified in February 2011, the Cambodian Prime Minister sent a letter to the UNSC requesting an urgent meeting to halt Thai aggression.[76] In response, the UNSC convened a meeting and issued a statement on 14 February 2011, calling both parties to exercise maximum restraint and resolve the dispute peacefully.[77] The statement also reiterated UN support for ASEAN's active and constructive role in the Cambodia-Thailand border dispute. With a mandate from the UNSC, Indonesia as the Chair of ASEAN hosted an ASEAN Informal Foreign Ministers' Meeting on 22 February 2011 in which an agreement on the deployment of Indonesian observers was reached. However, its implementation was never realised as the Thai government was reluctant to have a third party involved in the conflict and thus took a "non-committal attitude" to the proposed solution.[78] Another round of brutal clashes occurred towards the end of April 2011 and expanded from the disputed area near the Preah Vihear temple to a wider area along the border. Cambodia regarded the escalation of armed clashes as acts of aggression from Thailand that violated the recommendation of the UNSC and ASEAN's TAC. Finally, Cambodia decided to request the ICJ for a new interpretation of its 1962 judgement on 28 April 2011.

The tension subsided after the election of Yingluck Shinawatra as Thai Prime Minister on 3 July 2011 and the ICJ ruling over the Preah Vihear temple on 18 July 2011, which demanded Cambodia and Thailand create a provisional demilitarised zone over the disputed area. Having said that, Cambodia-Thailand border military clashes had at least four fundamental implications for Cambodia's strategic outlook. First, the border armed clashes reminded Cambodian leaders that Cambodia remained bullied and intimidated by its stronger neighbour. Worse still, due to demobilisation and disarmament following the reintegration of the Khmer Rouge soldiers in 1997–1998, the Cambodian armed forces were shocked and unprepared for Thai military assaults along the border. Some PAD leaders reportedly humiliated and mocked the Cambodian armed forces with the suggestion that it would take the Thai air force only three hours to destroy the Cambodian capital city of Phnom Penh. Second, Phnom Penh started to question the loyalty of its traditional ally, Hanoi. Initially, Cambodian military leaders approached Hanoi for weaponry, supplies, and other military assistance in an effort to build up its defence capability against Thailand's military aggressiveness. However, Hanoi responded negatively to Phnom Penh's request, saying that "the People's Army of Vietnam did not spare weapons as it was confronting with China's growing aggressiveness in the South China Sea."[79] As military tension along the Cambodia-Thailand border continued unabated, Cambodian leaders lobbied Vietnam, as the Chair of ASEAN in 2010, to table the border conflict in the agenda of the ASEAN meetings.[80] Disappointedly, Hanoi rejected Phnom Penh's request. Third, the armed clashes also prompted Cambodian leaders to rethink ASEAN's role in

maintaining peace and stability in the region. In fact, since becoming a member of ASEAN in 1999, the regional grouping was considered to be the cornerstone of Cambodia's foreign policy as Cambodian policymakers were convinced that ASEAN would be a crucial regional platform through which Cambodia could safeguard its sovereignty and territorial integrity as well as promote its economic interests. However, Cambodia's confidence in ASEAN faded due to the grouping's ineffective response to the Cambodia-Thailand border dispute. Finally, the arrogance and aggressiveness of the Thai military and the ruling elite in Bangkok, along with ASEAN's ineffectiveness to help resolve the border dispute, pushed Phnom Penh closer towards Beijing, whose influence had already been apparent in Cambodia. It is worth noticing that Chinese military assistance surged remarkably during Cambodia's increasingly tense border dispute with Thailand. Most of the new weapons that the Cambodian armed forces used during the border conflict with Thailand were Chinese products, which were cheap and easy obtain.[81]

Unease in Cambodia-Vietnam relations

As Cambodia-Thailand relationship improved in the late 2011, with an increasing focus on trade and investment flows and the strengthening of border checkpoints, Cambodia's tense neighbourhood relations shifted to the eastern border with Vietnam. These tensions are the reflection of the historical antagonism between the two countries, the fear of the Khmer of the Vietnamese, and the domestic politics in Cambodia as well as the strategic divergence between Phnom Penh and Hanoi. The tension also prompted Cambodian leaders to reassess Cambodia's security environment and strategic direction. Therefore, it can be argued that Cambodia's uneasy relationship with Vietnam has further pushed Phnom Penh's tilt towards Beijing.

Resurfacing of historical hatred by the Khmer towards Vietnam

The fear among the Cambodian people of their neighbour to the east – Vietnam – has generally been more profound compared to their concern over the perceived threat from Thailand partly due to the fact that the Khmer and the Thai share a cultural affinity. More importantly, there is the conviction among Cambodian strategists that despite their arrogance and aggressiveness, the Thai are less ambitious towards Cambodian territory. Cambodia's Vietnamese fear has been stimulated since the southwards expansion of the Nguyen dynasty in the eighteenth century. Even during the French protectorate, this fear existed among the Khmer as the French generally employed the Vietnamese as administrators and favoured labourers in Cambodia.[82] The Vietnamese fear continued to occupy Cambodian foreign policymakers after Cambodia regained its independence from France in 1953. As discussed in Chapter 2, Sihanouk's deviation from neutrality towards a quasi-alignment with China was partly driven by his fear that the Vietnamese would unify their country and then dominate the whole Indochinese region. The long-standing enmity between the two neighbouring countries exploded into a bloody war during

and after the Khmer Rouge rule in Cambodia from 1975 to 1979. Anti-Vietnamese sentiment among the Cambodians re-emerged again during the monitoring of the UNTAC from 1992 to 1993. As a result, over 30 Vietnamese were murdered in scattered incidents leading up to the May 1993 election.[83]

The 'Vietnamese syndrome' continues to be one of the most explosive issues in Cambodian domestic politics because of Vietnam's alleged encroachment into Cambodian territory and the illegal immigration of Vietnamese to Cambodia. Anti-Vietnamese nationalism based on the perceived Vietnamese threat still smoulders in the Cambodian population and has, from time to time, been manipulated by Cambodian politicians, especially leaders of the opposition CNRP. Recently, anti-Vietnam rhetoric has escalated since the Cambodian general election of July 2013. Paul Millar argues that "the CNRP has long been tarred with allegations that its leadership has tried to shore up its support among Khmer voters by launching racially charged polemics against ethnic Vietnamese immigrants and pledging to drive Vietnamese immigrants from Cambodian soil."[84] The opposition's use of anti-Vietnamese nationalism has been an attempt to delegitimise the Hun Sen government. Quite apart from its appeal to Khmer nationalist sentiments, the CNRP's anti-Vietnamese rhetoric also served to remind voters that the CPP's initial rise to power came not by the ballot box but through Hanoi's installation. By painting Hun Sen as Hanoi's puppet dictator, the CNRP attacks the very foundation of the Prime Minister's appeal as the man responsible for demise of the Khmer Rouge regime.

Suspicion even outright hatred of Vietnamese is not uncommon within activist circles and progressive NGOs. Tim Frewer observes that Cambodia's leading human rights NGOs have been "eerily quiet" over the issues of Vietnamese marginalisation, including the issue of evictions and the disenfranchisement of Vietnamese Cambodians.[85] Millar also notices that even among young Cambodian liberals and bloggers, "it is still almost impossible to have a conversation about the issue of the Vietnamese in Cambodia."[86] Among the Cambodian intelligentsia, the notion of the Vietnamese threat still holds. For instance, when asked about the Vietnamese in Cambodia, Dr. Sophal Ear, Associate Professor of Diplomacy and World Affairs at Los Angeles' Occidental College, said:

> It riles up people's passions about the alien other, but is there an illegal immigration problem in Cambodia? Of course there is. Is there an encroachment problem? Absolutely. The question is how to deal with this in productive ways.[87]

Surprisingly, negative perception on the Vietnam is also pervasive among the Cambodian younger generation. In September 2014, the Phnom Penh Post published an article with a stark title "Out of 20 of my friends, 17 hate the Vietnamese."[88] This suggests that chauvinism among Cambodian youth remains pervasive, as they have come to believe that the Vietnamese always have 'secret agenda' in Cambodia. Such an anti-Vietnamese sentiment might have serious implications for the Cambodia-Vietnam relations not only because the young will be the leaders of their country but also because their voice has been powerful as 75 per cent

of the Cambodia population are under the age of 35. In an informal discussion with ten grade-11 students in Phnom Penh, the author was impressed by their fear and misperception towards Cambodia's neighbours, particularly Vietnam. Their fear was shaped by Cambodia's loss of territory to Vietnam including Phu Quoc or Koh Tral in Khmer, alleged border encroachment and the moving of border markers into Cambodian territory, and increasing illegal ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia.[89] More interestingly, in the aftermath of the assassination of Cambodian popular political analyst Kem Lay in August 2016, the idea that the Vietnamese were behind the murder was developed and shared within social network in Cambodia, even among some senior government officials. The reasoning was that Kem Lay's analyses, which had been frequently broadcasted on Radio Free Asia and the Voice of America in Khmer language, were remarkable for the fact that they could link almost any issue to Vietnam. More noticeably, he conducted a project "100 Night Campaign" that was structured around encouraging Cambodians to observe and record instances of "Vietnamese colonizing Cambodia and swallowing Cambodian territories."[90]

Cambodia's growing tension with its eastern neighbour reached the government-to-government level. The Cambodian government opted for a tougher stance on two sensitive issues in the bilateral relationship, namely the border issue and the ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia. A Cambodian journalist pointed out that the tensions in the Cambodia-Vietnam relationship were surprising, "not because of the way the CNRP provoked it, but rather the manner in which the CPP responded to it."[91] It is believed that Phnom Penh's surprising shift in approach in its relationship with Hanoi was partly "a result of the changing political climate inside Cambodia," where the CPP suffered a steep loss of support in the July 2013 election.[92] The CPP's share of National Assembly seats fell to just 68 from 90 out of 123 following a surge of support for the CNRP, whose campaign mixed "crude anti-Vietnamese appeals" with pledges to end corruption and raise wages.[93] This suggests that the 'Vietnam syndrome' of Cambodia's old politics is back.[94] It is argued that as local and national elections were looming in 2017 and 2018, Hun Sen tried to take the initiative away from the opposition.[95] Carlyle Thayer argues that "for Hun Sen, you have to be posturing against the Vietnamese up to a certain point to deflate the sails of the opposition."[96]

Growing tensions along the Cambodia-Vietnam border

Border issues have been contentious in Cambodia's relations with Vietnam because both countries gained independence from France. The demarcation of the border represents daunting challenges to both Phnom Penh and Hanoi. The Cambodia-Vietnam land border stretches 1,137 km along ten provinces of Vietnam and nine provinces of Cambodia. In the colonial period, the French divided the land border according to two agreements: the Convention of 9 July 1870 and the Agreement of 15 July 1873 concluded between the Cambodian King and the Governor-cum-Commander-in-Chief of Cochinchina.[97] The maritime border was delineated in Circular No. 867-API – known as the Brevie Line – issued on

31 January 1939, which provided that all islands to the north of the Line would be under the authority of the French protectorate government in Cambodia while those to the south of the Line would fail under the authority of the French Cochinchinese government.[98] It is important to note that the borderline between Cambodia and Vietnam was actually regarded by the French as the administrative boundary between its two protectorates and thus was neither governed by legal agreements nor demarcated.

The French-delineated border, both the land border and the Brevie Line, triggered resentment and anger among the Cambodians. Khmer Kings blamed the French for imposing a border in favour of the Vietnamese. Worse still, as the decolonisation process began in Vietnam, France made an official transfer of Cochinchina to Vietnam, which was known to the Cambodians as *Kampuchea Krom* (the lower land of Kampuchea) on 4 June 1949.[99] To the Cambodians, it was an unacceptable, arbitrary, and irresponsible decision of the French. As far as the maritime border is concerned, France handed over all islands to the north of Brevie Line to the Saigon government after recognising independence of Cambodia on 9 November 1953.[100] This decision generated sovereignty disagreements between Sihanouk and the Saigon regime. From January 1956 to April 1960, Cambodia occupied seven islands to the north of Brevie Line, which were also claimed by the Saigon government.[101] A series of negotiations between Sihnanouk and later the Lon Nol government with the Saigon government failed. During the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia (1979–89), the PRK signed three border agreements with Hanoi, in 1982, 1983 and 1985. However, after the formation of a coalition government in 1993, both King Sihanouk and First Prime Minister Norodom Ranariddh publicly rejected the three treaties signed by the PRK, by arguing that the treaties nibbled away Cambodian territories.[102] The 1982 and 1985 agreements are particularly controversial among the Cambodians. The 1982 agreement delineated the historical waters between Cambodia and Vietnam, which put Phu Quoc island (known in Khmer as Koh Kral) in Vietnam.[103] Fairly speaking, although the vast majority of, if not all, the Cambodians hold the strong view that the French arbitrarily awarded Koh Tral to the Vietnamese in 1954, many argue that it is impossible legally and militarily to reclaim the island.

Equally controversially, Article 1 of the 1985 agreement says that Cambodia and Vietnam accepted the existing land border, which was delineated in detail on the US Army's UTM map (scale 1:50,000). To the critics, the Article violates that the 1993 Cambodian Constitute of which Article 2 clearly states that "the territorial integrity of the Kingdom of Cambodia shall absolutely not be violated within its borders as defined in the 1:100,000 scale map between the years 1933–1953 and internationally recognized between the years 1963–1969."[104] It has been argued that these agreements would technically put Cambodia in a disadvantageous position as the UTM map with the scale of 1:50,000 was never internationally recognised. Politically, the three border treaties were actually concluded when Cambodia was under the occupation of Vietnam in which Phnom Penh had allegedly been in a much more disadvantageous position. According to Evan Gottesman, Hanoi put pressure on the PRK government through Vietnamese

special advisors in Phnom Penh to make compromises and settle "one of the most unpopular aspects of the bilateral relationship."[105]

The opposition has always used the three border agreements to attack Prime Minister Hun Sen and his ruling CPP, particularly during election campaigns. However, after the CPP consolidated power after the July 2003 election victory, the Cambodia-Vietnam issue Hun Sen managed the border issues without seriously affecting Cambodia-Vietnam bilateral relations. In March 2005, Cambodia and Vietnam adopted the golden words of "good neighbourliness, traditional friendship, comprehensive and long-term cooperation" for the bilateral relationship of the two countries.[106] In October 2005, Phnom Penh and Hanoi signed a supplementary treaty to the 1985 border agreement in order to "defuse the borderline as an irritant in the bilateral relations."[107] Cambodia and Vietnam set up their respective Commissions on Border Demarcation and Marker Planting. In April 2011, the two countries signed a Memorandum of Understanding on demarcating the remaining area of the land boundary to be completed before the end of 2011. The deadline was later extended to the end of 2012. The border demarcation remains uncompleted due to Vietnam's unwillingness to speed up the process.[108]

The border issues flared up again in Cambodian politics after the 2013 election. The opposition has accused the Hun Sen government of being under Hanoi's strong influence and claimed that the 2005 supplementary treaty is unconstitutional. Noticeably, Phnom Penh's position on the Cambodia-Vietnam border issues has been tougher in the aftermath of the 2013 election. More than a dozen people were injured when Cambodian activists and Buddhist monks, led by two CNRP lawmakers, clashed with the Vietnamese authorities and villagers along the border in Svay Rieng Province, on 28 June 2015.[109] After the clashes, a spokesman of the Ministry of Interior, Khieu Sopheak, surprisingly described opposition activists who were inspecting the border as "people who love the nation."[110] The statement signified a visible shift in the ruling CPP's border policy towards Vietnam. Carlyle Thayer considered the shift a political move, as "Hun Sen appears to be playing along with the opposition to see how much traction they can obtain from the general population."[111] In other border incidents, the Cambodian government called on Vietnam to "stop what it called encroachment on its territory" in response to Vietnam's alleged violation of Cambodia's territory, including the digging of reservoirs and the construction of roads, buildings, and military outpost.[112] The Cambodian Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that Cambodia has sent some than 20 diplomatic notes to Hanoi to protest against Vietnam's violation of Cambodian territories since 2011.[113] Interestingly, the Ministry did not inform the public of the notes until May 2015.

By the same token, responding to allegations by the opposition party that the maps being used by the Cambodian government in its border negotiations and demarcations are fake, Prime Minister Hun Sen wrote to France, the United Kingdom and the US in July 2015 to request for the original maps of Cambodia that were made by France during the colonial period.[114] Hun Sen also asked the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to loan him the maps of Cambodia prepared by France in order to verify the authenticity of the government maps. Hun Sen's

efforts to involve third parties was, first and foremost, a response to the CNRP's accusation that the Cambodian government had used fake maps made by the Vietnamese in order to conduct border negotiations with Hanoi. Second, Phnom Penh has been discouraged by the slow progress of border negotiation process with Vietnam. According to a Cambodian official in charge of border affairs, the Cambodian government has made utmost efforts to "complete the border demarcation as soon as possible, but Hanoi seems to intentionally slow down the process."[115] It is speculated that Hanoi's unwillingness to speed up the border demarcation process was an attempt to use the Cambodia-Vietnam border issues to pressure Cambodia to conform to its interests, especially on the South China Sea.[116] Lastly, despite numerous requests to stop building a military post and other activities in the contested areas along the Cambodia-Vietnam border, Hanoi has refused to oblige. Cambodia's Senior Minister in charge of border affairs, Var Kimhong, expressed his frustration in a press conference that "I have told Vietnam many times during previous meetings and we recently sent a diplomatic note to protest against the construction. . . . We asked them to stop, but they did not listen to us."[117] Cambodian officials even vowed to forcefully dismantle any construction on their soil. For instance, speaking at a meeting with Vietnamese border officials in Phnom Penh in August 2016, Long Visalo, Secretary of State of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said that "if they dare to build, I will give orders for the building's removal."[118]

After a series of meetings of the Cambodia-Vietnam Joint Border Committee, Phnom Penh and Hanoi reached a breakthrough in an attempt to end the dispute over the demarcation of the two countries' border. During the meeting between Prime Minister Hun Sen and his Vietnamese counterpart Nguyen Xuan Phuc in Siam Reap in November 2016, the two Prime Ministers agreed to write a joint letter to the French government to request for more detailed maps of the Cambodia-Vietnam border.[119] For Hanoi, resolving border disputes is one way to respond to the perception of isolation in Indochina because both Cambodia and Laos are increasingly influenced by Beijing thanks to increasingly significant Chinese assistance and investment in the two countries. Hanoi has been worried that Cambodia, which many see as a 'quasi-vassal' state of China, could be manipulated to create problems along the border with Vietnam to distract attention from any incident with China in the South China Sea. Perhaps, Hanoi did not want to deal with border conflicts with its neighbours on two different fronts. Moreover, Hanoi remained keen to work with the current Hun Sen government than an unknown and seemingly anti-Vietnamese one in Phnom Penh, though it would no doubt prefer a government less influenced by Beijing. However, the prospect that both countries will complete the border demarcation remains a remote possibility.

Phnom Penh's crackdowns on illegal Vietnamese immigrants

The ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia have also been a daunting issue in the Cambodia-Vietnam relationship since 1953. Following the removal of Prince Sihanouk through a coup in 1970, the ethnic Vietnamese were under attack, resulting in several thousand casualties and some 250,000 ethnic Vietnamese fleeing to

Vietnam.[120] Most of the remaining ethnic Vietnamese were expelled in 1975 during the Khmer Rouge regime or died from disease, starvation, or execution during the reign of terror. The opposition and critics of Prime Minister Hun Sen, therefore, argue that the majority of the ethnic Vietnamese entered into Cambodia following the collapse of the Khmer Rouge regime in 1979. On top of that, the opposition also accuses that the CPP has allowed the illegal Vietnamese immigrants to vote, knowing exactly that those legal immigrants would vote for the ruling party so that they would be able to live in Cambodia. The anti-rhetoric is not new. In fact, the oppositions have been playing the anti-Vietnamese card, appealing to widespread nationalist sentiment in the country since 1993. They have been effective in using the nationalist card, as Vietnamese migrants are a cause for concern for many Cambodians. According to Jack Board, the increasing number of ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia "is often associated with uncontrolled immigration, shrinking resources and Vietnam's expansion of power, seen by some as a silent invasion."[121]

Interestingly, the Cambodian ruling party was seen to have adopted a tougher stance on the illegal ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia, after the disappointing election outcome in 2013. This prompts observers to ponder its motives. A researcher at Amnesty International, John Coughlan, articulates the view that Hun Sen knows "how deep this antipathy runs and could make a show of deporting marginalised Vietnamese living along the border areas as a means to avoid losing a critical mass of support to the opposition."[122] As a result, a campaign against illegal workers, mainly the Vietnamese, began in mid-2014. By the end of the year, the Ministry of Interior deported almost 1,300 illegal immigrants, 90 per cent of which were Vietnamese.[123] The deportation of the Vietnamese increased markedly in 2015 whereby more than 6,000 illegal Vietnamese immigrants were deported, compared to approximately 2,500 in 2016.[124] The Cambodian government defended the crackdown. Sok Ey San, spokesman of the ruling CPP, said:

> We follow the same norms as other countries. . . . If we illegally cross borders into other countries, those countries will crack down us. And if they illegally cross the border into Cambodia, we will crack down against them as well [*sic*].[125]

Historical gratitude has also become a thorny issue between the Khmer and the Vietnamese. In September 2016, a Vietnamese Facebook user who commented on the Prime Minister's page in Vietnamese that

> Cambodia eats the porridge and then pisses in the bowl. . . . Vietnam has sacrificed both its blood and money to save the Cambodian people from genocide. Now Hun Sen is turning his back on Vietnam. . . . Cambodia will eventually be poisoned and exterminated by China.[126]

In response, a Cambodian analyst argues:

> But let us be fair. When Cambodia expresses its gratitude for Vietnam's assistance, there seems to be endless manipulation of this gratitude used to serve

> unilateral interest for far too long and the history seems to become a one-sided story, while the other half of the story has been missing. That other half is that Cambodia also helped the Vietnamese in their quest for liberation and unification during the Vietnam War. Vietnam should not forget this history and should be grateful for Cambodia's assistance.[127]

Hun Sen's response was even more interesting as it complicated the bilateral relations between Phnom Penh and Hanoi. He lashed out in English:

> If you or your country have a problem with China, please solve it peacefully. Do not blame me and do not involve Cambodia in your country's internal issue. Of course, I am faithful to my nation, my King, and my own wife. . . . May I ask if this is your own word or it is from your leader's suggestion to attack me?[128]

However, Carl Thayer reads Hun Sen's comment lightly and argues that "Vietnam is mature enough to view Hun Sen's comments on Facebook as driven by domestic concerns, that is, playing on anti-Vietnamese sentiment" and thus cannot be equated the deterioration in Cambodia-Vietnam bilateral relations.[129] The author has different take on the recent developments of Cambodia-Vietnam relations. Hun Sen's recent anti-Vietnamese rhetoric is a new phenomenon in the Cambodia-Vietnam relations since the collapse of the Khmer Rouge regime in 1979. Such a rhetoric, coupled with recent border tensions and the crackdown on the illegal Vietnamese immigrants, may suggest that Phnom Penh-Hanoi ties are drifting apart, in both symbolic and substantive terms.

The South China Sea: a thorn in Cambodia-Vietnam relations

The tension in Cambodia-Vietnam relations is also the reflection of underlying strategic differences between the two countries. Strategically, Cambodia and Vietnam have recently taken very different approaches towards the changing security landscape of the Asia-Pacific. Vietnam has heavily hedged against the rise of China through the strengthening of its economic and defence ties with the US, Russia, Japan and India. Cambodia has, on the other hand, increasingly depended on China for economic and defence assistance. Strikingly, Cambodia and Vietnam have adopted very different approaches towards the maritime dispute in the South China Sea, which involves China and four ASEAN member states, including Vietnam. Cambodia, as a non-claimant state, has been unwilling to promote the South China Sea agenda at international forums, especially ASEAN, which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5. Cambodia is not interested in having the South China Sea issue dominating regional multilateral diplomacy that might upset Beijing and harm a good relationship between China and ASEAN. This strategic divergence between the two countries has created a certain level of distrust and tension. Obviously, Cambodia has repeatedly refused to join Vietnam and some other ASEAN members in formally rebuking China's claims in

the Southeast China Sea. Most noticeably, the maritime dispute caused a political crisis during the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Phnom Penh in July 2012 as the Foreign Ministers failed to issue a joint communiqué for the first time in ASEAN's history. The failure – known as 'Phnom Penh Fiasco' – has allegedly been interpreted as the result of enormous Chinese pressure on Cambodia, which blocked any mention of the South China Sea in the joint communiqué.[130] In the aftermath of the fiasco, Vietnamese diplomats privately expressed Hanoi's disappointment over Cambodia's attitude towards the South China Sea. For his part, Hun Sen lashed out at visiting Vietnamese leaders during a closed-door meeting that "true friends do not put one other's image to shame."[131] It has been reported that Prime Minister Hun Sen was very angry with Vietnamese leaders, particularly Vietnamese Foreign Minister Pham Binh Minh. In his congratulatory letter to his Vietnamese counterpart on the occasion of Vietnamese Independence Day on 2 September 2012, Cambodian Foreign Minister Hor Namhong kept the letter strangely short with an initial, rather than a signature as usual. As a seasoned diplomat who is always careful of his choice of words and diplomatic formality, this might be Hor Namhong's intention to express Phnom Penh's anger over Hanoi's demands over the South China Sea during the July 2012 ASEAN meeting.

Once again, the ASEAN-China Special Foreign Ministers' Meeting in June 2016 in Yuxi, China, was concluded without a joint press conference by the co-chairs of the meeting – China and Singapore. There was a lack of agreement on the wording of the joint communiqué pertaining the South China Sea. It was reported that "China was making a heavy-handed attempt to pressure ASEAN to adopt Beijing's preferred stance on the South China Sea."[132] Out of frustration, some ASEAN member states including Vietnam advocated an unprecedented move in the history of the regional grouping to issue a separate ASEAN statement instead of an ASEAN-China joint statement. However, it was reported that under Beijing's pressure, Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar forced the recall of ASEAN joint press statement by withdrawing their support on the statement.[133] Earlier in April 2016, China reached a four-point consensus with Brunei, Cambodia and Laos that territorial disputes in the South China Sea were "not an issue between China and ASEAN as whole."[134] Subsequently, Beijing was accused of dividing ASEAN in order to pre-empt any ASEAN's consensus on the verdict of the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS), while the above three ASEAN members were accused of protecting Beijing's position at the expense of ASEAN.

In defending his country's position, Prime Minister Hun Sen said that "Cambodia has, again and again, become a victim of the South China Sea issue because of unjust accusations."[135] He added that the 'Phnom Penh Fiasco' took place not because of Cambodia. The reason was, he said, "they bullied Cambodia," presumably referring to pressure from two ASEAN claimant states – the Philippines and Vietnam – to incorporate their strong wordings in the joint communiqué. He also blamed some ASEAN claimant states for "trying to drag Cambodia into the dispute," saying that "they have a dispute, but they get Cambodia to be responsible."[136] It seems that Hun Sen's confidence in ASEAN has gradually faded due to the grouping's ineffective response to the Cambodia-Thailand border conflict

from 2008 to 2011. In response to Cambodia's urge for help, all ASEAN and its member states could do was to encourage Phnom Penh and Bangkok to resolve the dispute bilaterally. In fact, the border dispute was never tabled on the agenda of the ASEAN Summits until Prime Minister Hun Sen, out of frustration, broke from protocol and raised the issue at the ASEAN Summit in May 2011. Furthermore, there is the perception in Phnom Penh that Cambodia has been bullied by some powerful ASEAN members revealed his unease that ASEAN is unwilling to protect the interests of small and weak member states, like Cambodia. Ironically, small states are forced to defend ASEAN's unity and the interests of the bigger member states at their own expanse.

Conclusion

Cambodia's revived perception of security threats from its bigger neighbours, Thailand and Vietnam, has pushed Phnom Penh towards the adoption of a clear foreign policy option, which is an alignment with China. The Cambodia-Thailand border conflict from 2008 to 2011 reminded Cambodian leaders that their small and weak state remains under security threats from its stronger neighbours. Such a perception has reshaped Cambodia's strategic direction away from ASEAN regionalism as Phnom Penh's confidence in ASEAN has diminished. As a result, Cambodia's alignment with China started to emerge. Later on, Cambodia's uneasy relationship with Vietnam – due to the border dispute, ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia, and the disagreement on the South China Sea issue – has further pushed Phnom Penh's alignment with Beijing. Cambodian leaders increasingly believe that the alignment with China is the best strategic option to address revived threats from Cambodia's two big neighbours. Even Sam Rainsy, the former president of the opposition CNRP who has been known as a close friend of the West, especially the US, supports Cambodia's alignment with China. In a TV interview in January 2014, he said:

> The CNRP is an ally of China. The CNRP fully supports China in the assertion of her sovereignty over [the] Xisha and Nansha islands in the South China Sea. . . . We are not allying with the US because it supports Vietnam. The presence of China is necessary to counterbalance against the influence of Vietnam [in Cambodia]. Now, Vietnam has many allies – the U.S. and Japan – in order to confront with China. But CNRP stands with China.[137]

As will be discussed in Chapter 7, China, not ASEAN or any other major powers, has become Cambodia's largest foreign investor and biggest economic benefactor. China is also the biggest provider of military assistance to Cambodia. Moreover, as for policymakers in Phnom Penh, China is not a threat but a protector of Cambodia's sovereignty and territorial integrity, as demonstrated on many occasions by Chinese top leaders, particularly during Cambodia-Vietnam border tensions. Therefore, it can be seen that Cambodia's bigger and historically antagonistic neighbours – Thailand and Vietnam – remain a compelling factor shaping

the country's foreign policy. As the perceived security threat from its neighbours increases, Cambodia's diplomatic tradition of seeking external power's support emerges as the most viable option.

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5 China's growing influence in Southeast Asia

Implications for Cambodia's strategic direction

China's growing economic influence and political clout in Southeast Asia and beyond have altered Phnom Penh's worldview. Cambodian foreign policymakers have increasingly been convinced that the future of the region will be Sino-centric. With such a worldview, they believe that Cambodia's alignment with China would put the Kingdom on the right side of history. Over the last two decades, the rise of China has transformed the geopolitical landscape in the Asia-Pacific region, with direct implications for the strategic environment of Southeast Asia. Since 2014, China has become the biggest trading partner of ASEAN. In 2015, China emerged as ASEAN's fourth-largest source of foreign investment. Moreover, ASEAN member states are expected to gain enormous benefits from China's trillion-dollar Belt and Road Initiative. However, Southeast Asian states have been concerned that as China's economic clout grows they might be absorbed into Beijing's orbit. Individually, ASEAN members would lose their foreign policy autonomy. Collectively, ASEAN might not be able to maintain its centrality in the multilateral diplomacy in the Asia-Pacific. Lately, China has become more assertive in promoting its interests in the region, particularly in the South China Sea. In this context, most ASEAN member states, such as Vietnam, Singapore, Thailand, and Indonesia, have selected a hedging strategy towards China.

In contrast, Cambodia has moved away from a hedging strategy towards an alignment with China, as discussed in the earlier chapter. Although Phnom Penh still stresses the importance of ASEAN, the regional grouping is no longer the cornerstone of Cambodia's foreign policy. As a result, Cambodia's position on the South China Sea has also evolved. Prior to the eruption of the Cambodia-Thailand border dispute in 2008–2011, Cambodia adopted a passive stance in the form of a wait-and-see approach towards the South China Sea with the objective of avoiding alienating both China and the ASEAN claimant states. As Cambodia's alignment with China took shape, Phnom Penh has taken a more proactive approach to the South China Sea, which is not necessarily pro-Chinese but has certainly alienated some ASEAN members.

The rise of China and Southeast Asian strategic paradoxes

The strategic landscape in the Asia-Pacific region has been overturned by a radical shift in the distribution of wealth and power between the major powers and the

corresponding shift in their strategic expectations, as well as by responses from smaller states to those shifts. As China continues to expand its economic and political influence, it is argued that "China may be returning to its traditional role as the central actor in Asia."[1] As a result, China has become more assertive in protecting and promoting its interests in the region. Against this backdrop, countries in Southeast Asia have to readjust their strategic direction to effectively address the changing regional security landscape. At the dawn of the twenty-first century, China continued its rise as a regional and global power. As China's influence in the region has steadily increased, its neighbours in Southeast Asia are increasingly facing strategic paradoxes – looking for Beijing for regional leadership and at the same time being concerned about China's strategic ambition in this part of the world. In 2005, David Shambaugh noted that "China's diplomacy has grown more confident and proactive; its economy is now a major engine of regional growth; its military is steadily modernizing; and its regional security posture is increasingly seen as benign."[2] No one can deny the impressive economic development and rapid diplomatic expansion of China across the globe. During the leadership of Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao, China achieved the highest sustained growth rate in its recorded history, with an average annual GDP growth rate of 10.4 per cent and 10.1 per cent per capita growth rate.[3] This achievement was particularly remarkable in the global context following the collapse of Lehman Brothers in 2008, which had devastating effects on the US and the rest of the world, known as the Great Recession.

In response to the Great Recession, Beijing launched a massive stimulus package of USD640 billion in late 2009, which allowed China to overcome the global economic crisis.[4] Impressively, China stunned the world with the ballyhooed hosting of the 2008 Beijing Olympics and the 2010 Shanghai Expo. More remarkably, China officially surpassed Japan in 2010, as the largest economy in Asia and the second largest in the world, just after the US. Over the past decade, it has emerged as the largest trading partner of many countries, including Japan, South Korea, India, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia, Australia, and ASEAN as a regional economic grouping.[5] Ideationally, China has historically been viewed as "more advanced and hence a source of enlightenment to its neighbours."[6] As China emerges as a global economic powerhouse, its development model has become more attractive to developing countries in many parts of the globe. According to Jean-Pierre Cabestan, many countries in the developing world "dream of imitating China's success story and would not object to instilling a stronger dose of authoritarianism to speed up their economic development."[7] Everyone has been impressed by the fact that China's poverty reduction has taken place on a scale unprecedented in the history of mankind. According to the World Bank, since the economic reform that began in 1978, more than 850 million Chinese have been rescued from poverty.[8]

The ascendance of Xi Jinping as the new Chinese president in 2012 has inspired the country's confidence to promote its status on the world stage. At the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in November 2012, President Xi proposed two "centennial goals" for China to achieve over the next four decades.[9] First, China is poised to become a moderately prosperous society by 2021. Second, China would be a prosperous, strong, culturally advanced, harmonious,

democratic, and modern socialist country by 2049. More noticeably, only less than two weeks after Xi's assumption of power, he declared the "China Dream" and stressed that "fulfilling the China Dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese, we must achieve a rich and powerful country, the revitalisation of the nation, and the people's happiness."[10] According to Howard French, the China Dream is to restore China's global status, which was once "at the very centre of the world, whose position was recognized as such by peoples both far and wide."[11] While this dream remains ambiguous in terms of what foreign policy goals it entails, there are indications that grand strategies to achieve some of its goals have taken shape. First and foremost, President Xi laid out a vision for the promotion of the Asian security at the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA) in May 2014. In what he termed the "New Asian Security Concept" (NASC), Xi emphasised that "sustainable security means that we need to focus on both development and security so that security would be durable."[12] Strategically, NASC is seen as an attempt to challenge the American supremacy in Asia, for the concept rejects Cold War–era military alliances as the basis of regional security order. Xi asserted that "to beef up and entrench a military alliance targeted at a third party is not conducive to maintaining common security."[13] Alarmingly, at least for the West, the concept raises a Monroe Doctrine of sorts in Asia as Xi stated that "it is for the people of Asia to run the affairs of Asia, solve the problems of Asia, and uphold the security of Asia."[14]

The China Dream is also closely linked with military might. Xi declared that "we must preserve the bond of a rich country and a strong military, and strive to build a consolidated national defence."[15] In fact, military strength is required to give legitimacy to the Chinese Community Party and President Xi Jinping as the country's defender-in-chief. According to Tom Miller, the party propaganda systemically picks the historical wound of national humiliation with the objective of consolidating national identity around its own role in building a "rich country and strong army."[16] That was the logic behind the vast military parade held in Beijing in September 2015, to commemorate the seventieth anniversary of victory over Japan as a projection of an image of strength, both to "bolster its rule at home and to scare potential enemies abroad," especially the US and Japan.[17] In this context, it can be argued that Xi has gradually abandoned Deng Xiaoping's dictum of lying low in international affairs and declared that China would play a proactive role in Asia and beyond.

Consequently, China has prioritised "neighbourhood diplomacy" and begun to formulate concrete policies to translate its "economic heft into regional leadership."[18] Beijing has declared its intention to "make more friends" and forge a "community of shared destiny" in Asia.[19] In this regard, China is not seeking to build a formal alliance structure but creating "a web of informal alliances lubricated by Chinese cash."[20] As its neighbours become ever more economically dependent on it, Beijing believes its geopolitical leverage will be strengthened. To this end, President Xi announced grand strategies to embark on a geopolitical and economic restructuring of the Eurasian region. China's growing foreign exchange reserves of nearly USD4 trillion has enabled Beijing to launch two ambitious

projects: the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, known together as the "One Belt, One Road" (OBOR) and later named "Belt and Road Initiative" (BRI). The BRI projects will connect countries in Asia to Europe, covering 55 per cent of the world GNP, 70 per cent of the global population, and 75 per cent of known energy reserves.

To implement the BRI projects, China established the Silk Road Fund (SRF), with Chinese investment of USD40 billion, in December 2014. More assertively, China initiated the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) with an authorised capital of USD100 billion, of which China contributed 50 per cent. With 57 nations as founding members, AIIB commenced its operation in Beijing in December 2015. Particularly important for Southeast Asian countries is the building of the Maritime Silk Road (MSR) that will connect China with parts of Southeast Asia, South Asia, East Africa, and Europe. MSR will provide a new platform and opportunity for ASEAN to forge a closer ASEAN Community and strengthen its relationship and a shared future with China. During the ASEAN-China Summit in Kuala Lumpur in November 2015, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang pledged that China would offer infrastructure loans totalling USD10 billion to ASEAN countries and free assistance worth USD560 million to developing ASEAN member states in 2016.[21] Clearly, BRI has become a prominent issue in China's political discourse. The *South China Morning Post* even called it the "most significant and far-reaching project the nation has ever put forwards."[22] China expects that BRI will strengthen its influence in global economic and political affairs, as it will allow China to play a more proactive role in reshaping the economic architecture of the Asia-Pacific region and global governance structures.[23] Through BRI, China is "forging ties, creating new markets for the country's construction companies and exporting its model of state-led development in a quest to create deep economic connection and strong diplomatic relations."[24] To implement the programme, China has pledged USD1 trillion with an objective of refashioning the global economic order, bringing countries and companies more tightly into China's orbit.[25]

The rise of China to regional leadership coincides with the decline of American supremacy in the region. Not a few commentators see the rise of Donald Trump to power in the White House as an opportunity for Xi's China to assume a regional and global leadership role. Chinese leaders recognise the void created by Trump's 'America First' and his questioning of America's traditional leadership role in the world. Xi Jinping, the first Chinese president ever to attend the World Economic Forum in Davos, opened the annual gathering with full endorsement of globalisation, free trade, and cooperation between nations as a response to Trump's protectionist rhetoric. Although it is not clear whether Xi's statement is just rhetoric or his real intent, it illustrates obviously Chinese new leadership's aspiration to assume a greater global role. As the Trump administration walked away from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), the American-led trade pact that was envisioned as a buttress against China's growing influence, Xi stated:

> It is true that economic globalization has created new problems . . . but this is no justification to write off completely economic globalization. Rather,

> we should adapt to and guide economic globalization, cushion its negative impact, and deliver its benefits to all countries and all nations.[26]

Clearly, Xi Jinping is taking advantage of Trump's 'America First' foreign policy. Naturally, in the absence of the American global leadership, there will be more room for Beijing to step in. In May 2017, the world witnessed a big gathering of world leaders to discuss BRI and its plans to link Asia, Africa, and Europe. China has touted the forum as the major international event of the year, with 29 heads of state or government to be in attendance.[27] Heads of international organisations, including UN Secretary General António Guterres, President of the World Bank Jim Yong Kim, and Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund Christine Lagarde, attended the forum.[28] At the forum, Xi announced an additional USD124 billion in funding for the BRI projects, including loans, grants, and USD8.7 billion in assistance to developing countries along the Belt and Road.[29] While Trump's America was over-consumed by domestic politics, Xi's China hosted approximately 5,000 delegates from 150 countries and 90 international organisations, including 38 heads of states and governments at the Second Belt and Road Forum in Beijing in April 2019. Over USD64 billion in deals were signed during the forum.[30]

Geopolitically, Trump has undermined confidence among countries in the Asia-Pacific region that Washington had the resolve to resist Beijing's ambitions. Ashley Townshend argues that, as Trump tends to think of American support for its allies in transactional terms, the White House will be "on the hunt for greater burden-sharing and tweetable wins for American jobs."[31] Trump's transactional foreign policy has damaged American credibility among its allies in the region. Moreover, if Trump loses interest in championing the liberal internationalist goal of the pivot, such as strong US-ASEAN ties, US staying power in Asia will be called into question. Consequently, vulnerable Southeast Asian countries have no choice but to reconfigure their trade and security strategies towards China.

China's growing influence in ASEAN: opportunities, challenges, and responses

Despite China's rapid rise, not everyone is very convinced that it will be the dominant player in Asia, not to say the world, in the near future. Paul Dibb and John Lee question the idea that China will soon become the dominant power in Asia due to "China's economic, social, and national fragilities, its lack of major friends or allies in the region as well as the considerable military deficiencies and challenges faced by the People's Liberation Army."[32] However, whether China will become a global power or not, or is already one, it is already perceived as such by many around the world, particularly in Southeast Asia. Since the mid-1990s, China has actively engaged with individual member states of ASEAN and the regional grouping in order to assure the region that China's rise would be peaceful and economically beneficial not only for the Chinese but also for the peoples in Southeast Asia. However, Beijing is far from entirely successful in persuading Southeast Asia as a whole to believe in its 'peaceful rise' theory. Some countries

in the region have harboured suspicions and concerns over Beijing's real intent as its power grows. China's growing assertiveness to exert its claim in the South China Sea exacerbates these concerns.

During the past decades, China's foreign policy has experienced a remarkable transformation from being a developing country, focused mainly on domestic issues, to a regional and global power. China's economic success over the last two decades has enabled Beijing to pursue a greater role on the regional and the international stage. Nowhere is China's presence more keenly felt than within Southeast Asia, which China has chosen to be the starting point of its regional and global power projection, as discussed in Chapter 3. Since the mid-1990s, China has developed the policy of "Good Neighbourliness" in order to strengthen its relations with Southeast Asia.[33] The Chinese leadership was well aware of the distrust within Southeast Asia due to its support until the late 1980s for communist movements in the region. The policy of "Good Neighbourliness" served above all the purpose of confidence-building and reassurance. It was accompanied by Beijing's efforts to persuade the region that China would neither seek hegemonism nor bully smaller states in the region. The policy is Beijing's mantra, which includes (1) unconditional support for any political systems; (2) strategic engagement in the interests of regional stability; (3) calls for closer economic cooperation; and (4) intensified cultural and political exchanges.[34] Moreover, China has expressed its willingness to take part in all regional multilateral cooperation initiatives since the late 1990s, particularly ASEAN-led mechanisms. As a dialogue partner of ASEAN since 1991, China has worked closely with the regional organisation and tried to strengthen ASEAN's role. It is argued that Beijing has initiated far more joint projects than other partners, such as Japan or the US.[35] China continues to enhance its dialogue and cooperation with ASEAN through various mechanisms, including ASEAN-China Dialogue, the ARF, APT, the EAS, and the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus). China was the first dialogue partner of ASEAN to accede to the TAC in Southeast Asia in October 2003, and also the first nuclear weapon state that expressed its intention to accede to the Protocol to the Southeast Asia Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone (SEANWFZ).[36]

Beijing's proactive diplomacy and frequent official visits by Chinese leaders to Southeast Asian capitals have promoted China's relations with all countries in the region. Although the fact that the level of closeness between China and individual ASEAN member states is not the same and varies in accordance with proximity, historical background, political system, culture, and so on, China has generally enjoyed good relations with all ASEAN countries over the last two decades. Politically, Southeast Asia has welcomed China's re-emergence since the end of the Cold War, accepting the "One China" policy and severing diplomatic ties with Taiwan.[37] Economically, China's trade with the ASEAN countries has dramatically increased after the entry into force of the ASEAN-China Free Trade Agreement in 2010. In 2008, China bypassed the US to become the third-largest trading partner of ASEAN following Japan and the EU. In the same year, the total trade between China and ASEAN reached over USD191 million, compared to over USD211 million of ASEAN-Japan bilateral trade, and more than USD201 million

ASEAN-EU trade exchange.[38] China displaced Japan as ASEAN's leading trade partner with two-way trade surpassing USD366 billion in 2014.[39] ASEAN-China economic relations continued to maintain their strong momentum with total bilateral trade at USD346 billion in 2015.[40] China's investment in Southeast Asian countries has also rapidly grown. FDI flows from China to ASEAN amounted to USD8.2 billion in 2015, positioning China as ASEAN's fourth-largest source of foreign investment.[41]

More importantly, Southeast Asia stands to benefit from China's BRI projects. Many studies suggest that there is a significant need of infrastructure development across Asia, including Southeast Asia. According to an ADB report, Asia needs at least USD8.2 trillion in financing infrastructure investment from 2010 to 2020.[42] In this context, ASEAN adopted the Master Plan of ASEAN Connectivity (MPAC) in 2010 and instituted an ASEAN Infrastructure Fund with a pooling resource of USD485.2 million in equity contribution and USD162 million in hybrid capital to address the infrastructure gap in the region.[43] The MPAC is designed to promote regional physical infrastructure, institutions, and people-to-people contacts. Physically, it will connect and improve the region's infrastructure, which allows the seamless movement of people, goods, and services. Institutionally, it will reduce policy and institutional barriers where rules, regulations, and standards will be harmonised, while member states' technical capacity is improved. Last but not least, it will bring the peoples of ASEAN closer to the realising of the ASEAN Community.

Apparently, MPAC and MSR are believed to be complementary as they share striking similarities and parallels. Both envisage transport connectivity as a way to bring member countries closer to one another and to facilitate better access for trade, investment, tourism, and people-to-people exchanges. To this end, according to the Chinese Ambassador to ASEAN, building the "21st Century Maritime Silk Road will help ASEAN to achieve its connectivity projects."[44] It is believed that MSR will help, to some extent, ASEAN to upgrade its physical connectivity by building an integrated connectivity network, including the network of sea and water transformation, express highway, high-speed railway, aviation, and communication optical cable. Evidently, during the ASEAN-China Summit in Kuala Lumpur in November 2015, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang pledged that China would offer infrastructure loans totalling USD10 billion to ASEAN countries and free assistance worth USD560 million to least developed ASEAN member states in 2016.[45] MSR will also create more opportunities to further enhance people-to-people contacts, including cooperation in education, culture, and tourism. Every year there are approximately 18 million people exchanged between Southeast Asia and China. Noticeably, the number of Chinese students studying in ASEAN countries and ASEAN students studying in China increased to around 426,000 from 2010 to 2014.[46] The year of 2015 was designated as the Year of China-ASEAN Education Cooperation. Moreover, efforts have been made to enhance exchanges among media and think tanks through various platforms, such as the ASEAN-China Centre, ASEAN-China Education Cooperation Week, Network of ASEAN-China Think-Tanks, and the building of tourism circles in the Pan-Beibu Gulf and along MSR.[47]

Despite the great significance of MSR for ASEAN connectivity projects and the future of ASEAN-China relations, there are concerns expressed among those in ASEAN member states. There are at least four main concerns that Southeast Asian scholars shared at a conference on "The Belt and Road Initiative and Its Implications for Cambodia" in Phnom Penh on 21–22 December 2015.[48] First, as the economic size and political power of China have expanded tremendously relative to its Southeast Asian neighbours, the growing asymmetry alone worries some in the region. On top of that, maritime disputes in the South China Sea between China and ASEAN claimant states have contributed to growing suspicion and concerns in the region that a rising China might not be as benign as Chinese leaders have told to the rest of the region. Second, ASEAN member states harbour the fear that being overly dependent on China economically would undermine their foreign policy. It is argued that BRI might be China's grand strategy to create a core-to-periphery structure of connectivity – Beijing as the hub and other countries the spokes of the system – of which smaller countries have to compromise on their interests. Third, China's growing economic and political clout might weaken ASEAN's unity and thus centrality. ASEAN's centrality – a driving force in regional multilateral diplomacy and cooperation arrangements, such as the ARF, the APT, and the EAS – has been a product of the successful regional integration and unity of the Southeast Asian states. With China's growing influence in individual ASEAN members and Asia as a whole, countries in the region might have to conform to China's interest at the expense of ASEAN's unity, which consequently puts ASEAN's centrality at risk. Lastly, not a few in ASEAN share concerns over the investment practices of Chinese state-owned companies. It has been argued that those companies have a mixed reputation with regard to the support for labour standards, environmental protection, and quality of work. They have also been accused of involving in corrupt practices with governments and local authorities. These concerns and scepticism have been echoed due to the lack of Beijing's sincere engagement with opposition parties, independent think tanks, NGOs and civil society organisations, and the public as a whole.

In addition to Southeast Asia's concerns over economic overdependence on China and thus diplomatic submission to its northern giant, many in the region have been anxious about Beijing's increasing assertiveness, particularly in the South China Sea. For much of the decade leading up to 2010, Beijing had been engaged in what was widely known as 'smile diplomacy' towards Southeast Asia to win heart and mind of countries in the region. Consequently, there had been a notable shift in perceptions within Southeast Asia of China as potentially destabilising force to a potential partner. However, Beijing has not completely dispelled all suspicions that the PRC as a great power could, in the future, try to dominate the region in contravention of what Beijing claims as "peaceful rise." Thus, Southeast Asian governments had been prepared for the possibility that a strong China would demand special privileges and threaten the autonomy of smaller states. That concern has been turned into a reality since 2010 by China's increasing assertiveness in pushing its claims in the South China Sea.[49] As a result, while further carrying out the engagement approach, ASEAN governments, at the same

time, are employing the second strategy of hedging. Hedging refers to a set of strategies aimed at avoiding a situation in which states cannot decide upon more straightforward alternatives such as balancing, bandwagoning, or neutrality.[50] The strategy is designed to keep open more than one strategic option against the possibility of a future uncertainty or threat. In Southeast Asia, hedging has been used to establish links with other large outside powers as counterweights to Chinese influence. In this regard, some Southeast Asian countries, noticeably the Philippines, Vietnam, and Singapore, are encouraging the US to maintain military presence in the region. However, almost all countries in the region – besides American traditional allies, the Philippines, and Thailand – decline to establish a formal military alliance with the US. Moreover, ASEAN member states also bring other major powers in the strategic game of region. For instance, India, Russia, Australia, and New Zealand were given seats in the EAS and the ADMM-Plus.

Indonesia is a good example of regional hedging strategy to address the uncertain security landscape in Asia. While China has become a more important economic partner of Indonesia, Jakarta's relationship with the US is more substantive on security issues. However, Indonesia has long been sceptical of great powers' intent. It also continues to feel that it deserves to exercise a leading role in shaping not only the future course of ASEAN and regional politics. Therefore, according Rizal Sukma, a well-known scholar and the current Indonesian ambassador to the UK, Jakarta is undertaking a hedging strategy, aimed at moderating the "potentially negative implications of the rise of China" for regional order and simultaneously reducing "America's dominance as a hegemonic power in the region."[51] Similarly, China's increasing political, economic, and military power has far-reaching implication for Singapore's economic and strategic prospects. However, although Singapore does not perceive the rise of China in terms of military threats, it harbours concerns about China's future role and place in the region and how it will affect the regional security architecture. Therefore, Singapore sees the necessity of enmeshing the US in Asia.[52] Vietnam is a special case in the hedging strategy against China.[53] On the one hand, Vietnam is balancing against the Chinese threat in the South China Sea through self-help by developing its own sufficient military capacity and strengthening its defence cooperation with the US and other major powers in order to deter China from using force in the maritime disputes. On the other hand, Vietnam has been utilising high-level party and state visits as well as developing a dense network of bilateral engagement in order to codify its relations with China. It has also managed to continuously promote economic ties with China and enhance greater economic interdependence, which may act as a cushion to absorb tensions arising from South China dispute.

Broadly, individual countries in the region might choose different toolkits in their hedging strategy against China's rise, based on their geography, historical experience, and overall threat assessment. However, it is clear that ASEAN has been an important factor in their hedging strategy. ASEAN member states adopts this approach by enmeshing both China and the US into regional multilateral mechanisms, especially in ASEAN and its forums – including the ARF, the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus, and the EAS. This approach enables

Southeast Asian nations to address potential threats from the great powers by socialising them with norms and rules and, when needed, imposing collective pressure that can constrain their behaviours. Moreover, ASEAN also engages other major powers such as Japan, South Korea, India, the EU, Russia, and Australia in order to create a 'dynamic equilibrium' in Southeast Asia. The active engagement of these major powers creates push-and-pull effects that provide Southeast Asian countries greater freedom and flexibility.

Phnom Penh's worldview: emerging Sino-Centric regional order

Unlike other governments in Southeast Asia, the rapid rise of China has convinced the Cambodian government that the future geopolitics and geo-economics of Asia will be Sino-centric.[54] With a strong belief in the future of 'Pax Sinica,' Phnom Penh is one of the first ASEAN member states to express its firm support for all above-mentioned initiatives of Xi Jinping. As far as NASC is concerned, the Cambodian government supports the concept without any reservation. In November 2015, Cambodian Defence Minister Tea Banh told his visiting Chinese counterpart Chang Wanquan that Cambodia "appreciates the security concept and cooperation initiatives" that have been proposed by China and "stands by China's efforts in safeguarding the peace and stability of the region."[55] Cambodia has also participated in China-led regional forums. For instance, in July 2015, Cambodia became a dialogue partner of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), whose members include China, Russia, and four 'Stan' states in Central Asia as well as India and Pakistan. By virtue of its membership's geopolitical location and richness in natural resources, SCO is the most important regional organisation in the eyes of Beijing. Cambodia also became a member of the CICA in 2011. Besides SCO, CICA is the second most important platform for international cooperation that does not include the US and its ally, Japan. That explains why Xi declared NASC at the 2014 CICA summit.

In contrast, there has been a growing perception within the Cambodian foreign policy community of the decline of the US, which has been enforced by the ascendance of Trump to the White House. As China's economic influence and military strength have been on the rise, some foreign policymakers in Phnom Penh are convinced that the US will eventually lose its supremacy in Asia to China.[56] More importantly, while the majority of countries in Southeast Asia see rising China as both an opportunity and a challenge, Cambodian leaders have a different read on this important issue. More often than not, they tend to view a rising China as an opportunity, strategically and economically. Therefore, it can be argued that while hedging seems to be the mainstream strategic direction of Southeast Asia towards the great powers, especially China, Phnom Penh will not select this strategy at least in the foreseeable future. In fact, Cambodia – along with Laos and, to a greater extent, Myanmar – does not seem to have the privilege of strategic manoeuvrability due to the imbalance of its relations with China and the US. As for Cambodia-US relations, there are many hurdles to overcome due to the trust deficit between the two countries' leaders and Phnom Penh's perception that the

US cannot be reliable when it comes to Cambodia's security and survival, which will be further discussed in Chapter 6.

From a strategic standpoint, Phnom Penh does not consider China a threat but a potential balancing power against its stronger and historically antagonistic neighbours, Thailand and Vietnam. Cambodian leaders have never taken for granted security threats from these two countries. To address this geopolitical predicament, Cambodian leaders had sought support and protection from external power(s), whenever necessary and available. As a result, China has emerged as an important strategic partner and protector of Cambodia's territorial integrity. Chinese top leaders have, in many occasions, expressed Beijing's commitment to protect Cambodia's security and sovereignty. Militarily, China has also been Cambodia's biggest source of assistance, including military trucks, helicopters, aircrafts, and other equipment to the Cambodian armed forces. Cambodian strategists believe that as China's influence in Thailand continues to grow, Phnom Penh's "close and trustful" ties with China would help tamper Bangkok's aggressive behaviour towards Cambodia.[57] It is also argued that China's traditional foreign policy objective towards Indochina has been to maintain an independent Cambodia in order to prevent the domination of Vietnam in the region. Nowadays, thanks to China-Vietnam territorial disputes in the South China Sea, Cambodian strategists are of the view that Cambodia can rely on China to check the Kingdom's neighbour to the east. As the convergence of Cambodia-China strategic interests increases, Beijing has been increasingly important in Phnom Penh's strategic calculus.

From an economic perspective, Beijing's influence in Cambodia continues to grow because China has poured in billions of dollars of investment and foreign aid, as will be seen in Chapter 7. Moreover, Cambodian leaders have high hope in Xi Jinping's mega projects, such as AIIB and BRI. Cambodia is one of the strongest supporters the two initiatives. In May 2015, the Cambodian National Assembly ratified an investment proposal of USD62.3 million to the AIIB, making Cambodia one of the 57 founding members of the bank. Then Cambodian Minister of Commerce Sun Chanthol applauded the creation of the bank and noted that "Cambodia is proud of being one of the founding members of the AIIB."[58] Similarly, Prime Minister Hun Sen praised AIIB and China's SRF for promising to play a very important role in providing financial support to developing countries. He said in many occasions that BRI would "benefit Cambodia's social and economic development" and "facilitate regional integration and maintain regional stability."[59]

As far as Southeast Asia is concerned, Cambodia sees Xi's initiatives as a positive development for a strengthened ASEAN-China relationship. Cambodian senior advisor to Prime Minister Hun Sen Kao Kim Hourn argues that "ASEAN's need for capital for connectivity projects is huge, so China's pledge of infrastructure loans to ASEAN is very helpful," and that BRI would be a boon for the entire region.[60] It is obvious that there are enormous opportunities for Cambodia from participating in those initiatives, including seeking political support, widening diplomatic outreach, expanding markets and attracting investment and development assistance, and promoting socio-cultural exchanges. China has already played an increasingly important role in the socio-economic development of

Cambodia, as its primary trading partner, largest source of FDI, and top provider of development assistance and soft loans. Economic growth, job generation, and poverty reduction are the priorities of the government and the ruling elite as they are key for regime legitimacy, as detailed in Chapter 7. Sun Chanthol simply said that "If you don't provide me with Big Mac when I'm starving and you tell me not to eat the [Chinese] fried rice, then I'm sorry."[61]

Cambodia's hard choice: between ASEAN and China

While China has expanded its economic and strategic influence in Cambodia to become the most important strategic partner of Cambodia, Phnom Penh's confidence in ASEAN has diminished, as discussed in the previous chapter. It is worth mentioning that since becoming a member of ASEAN on 30 April 1999, the regional grouping has been always considered at the core of Cambodia's foreign policy. Initially, Cambodian foreign policymakers had been convinced that ASEAN would be a crucial regional platform in which Cambodia can safeguard and promote its strategic, political, and economic interests. Given a changing strategic and security landscape in Asia, particularly the intensified tension over the maritime disputes in the South China Sea between China and some ASEAN claimant states, Cambodia had been pushed into difficult foreign policy choice between ASEAN and China. Cambodia's foreign policy dilemma was obviously manifested during its chairmanship of ASEAN in 2012. Its foreign policy option has been seen as in favour of Beijing, illustrated by the failure of the ASEAN Foreign Ministers to issue a joint communiqué after the conclusion of their meeting in July 2012. Having said that, Cambodia's foreign policy towards ASEAN is far more complicated. In fact, ASEAN remains crucial in Cambodia's foreign policy. Public opinion in Cambodia on ASEAN, particularly among the country's intelligentsia, is still positive and encouraging. Therefore, ASEAN regionalism and an alignment with China continue to be Cambodia's foreign policy hard choices.

In retrospect, Cambodia had never expressed its strong interest in joining ASEAN throughout the Cold War. Immediately after ASEAN was founded on 8 August 1967, Cambodia could have joined the regional grouping. However, Cambodia failed to realise its membership in ASEAN due to the perception that this regional organisation was a pro-Western club as well as Phnom Penh's preoccupation of its own civil strife. Following international peacekeeping operations and the UN-supervised election in 1993, Cambodia had the best opportunity to seek integration into the region and the world. This was possible due to the collapse of the former Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, which provided a strategic window of opportunity for Cambodia to achieve a comprehensive political settlement that brought an end to its civil war and enabled this war-torn country to integrate itself into the regional and international community. At the regional level, ASEAN was eager for enlargement in order to realise its founding fathers' dream of including all countries of Southeast Asia into the association. The end of the Cold War paved the way for ASEAN's expansion, as it put an end to the division between ASEAN and the Indochinese states of Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam along ideological lines.

At the national level, the post-UNTAC Cambodia embarked on a new era with a more stable and peaceful environment and increased political space due to national reconciliation and the institutionalisation of democratic processes. More importantly, Cambodian leaders also learnt from strategic mistakes and failures of their country's past foreign policy of isolationism following the Khmer Rouge's ascendancy to power in 1975. As a small and weak nation emerging from decades of war and destruction, Cambodia could not afford to continue its past policy of isolation and over-reliance on bilateral diplomacy alone.[62] Eventually, Cambodia became a full member of ASEAN in April 1999. Then, ASEAN became the cornerstone of Phnom Penh's foreign policy as it provided a strategic gateway for Cambodia to regain its regional role as well as to promote its national interests. Cambodia has actively played an increasingly important role in ASEAN and other regional affairs. It has signed and fully implemented all key documents of ASEAN, including the TAC, Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN) Treaty, SEANWFZ Treaty, and the ASEAN Convention on Counter-Terrorism, and has also actively canvassed the five nuclear powers – China, France, Russia, the UK, and the US – to sign the Protocol of the SEAWFZ Treaty to make it more meaningful.

Three years after becoming the member of ASEAN, Cambodia successfully hosted the 8th ASEAN Summit, under the theme "Phnom Penh Agenda: Towards a Community of Southeast Asian Nations," in Phnom Penh on 4–5 November 2002.[63] Economically, the Summit prioritised ASEAN's collaboration with the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) programme to accelerate the ASEAN integration, the promotion of ASEAN as a single tourist destination, and the strengthening of the ASEAN solidarity for peace and security, especially in the fight against terrorism. More importantly, on the security front, the Foreign Ministers of ASEAN and China signed the DOC, which was regarded as a "milestone" as China "had previously insisted on bilateral negotiation with the claimant states and had avoided multilateralism."[64] The adoption of the DOC was a very important and positive step for the claimant states in the territorial disputes to defuse diplomatic tension and military confrontation for it has presented two aspects for peaceful settlement: (1) the confirmation of peaceful resolution of territorial disputes and self-restraint of hostile attitude; and (2) the enhancement of confidence-building through mutual exchange of military personnel and cooperation in environmental research.[65] Ten years later, Cambodia once again took over the ASEAN Chairmanship in 2012. It assumed the ASEAN Chairmanship with a goal of realising the ASEAN Community. To this end, Cambodia proposed a theme "ASEAN: One Community, One Destiny." The theme reflected Cambodia's resolve to realise a "people-centred integration with poverty reduction, and creating an environment for the security and safety of ASEAN citizens."[66] In his opening remarks at the ASEAN Summit in April 2012, Prime Minister Hun Sen stressed:

> ASEAN in 2012 highlights the joint determination and cooperation of the ASEAN people to work in chorus to build the ASEAN Community as a cohesive family, living in political security, economic and socio-cultural harmony, and which is rules-based, peaceful and economically strong.[67]

Having said that, Cambodian leaders have lately started to question ASEAN's security role in the aftermath of the Cambodia-Thailand border dispute in 2008–2011. On 20 June 2016, Prime Minister Hun Sen reminded Cambodian young public servants again four main factors encouraging Cambodia to join ASEAN.[68] First, ASEAN's principle of non-interference would help Cambodia to address its external security challenges. Second, a consensus-based ASEAN would ensure that "whether the country is rich or poor, big or small, every member has one voice equally." Third, Cambodia would stand to benefit from ASEAN in terms of "economic construction, socio-economic development and connectivity." Finally, Cambodia would benefit from ASEAN's "big diplomatic outreach to partners." Prime Minister Hun Sen's recall of reasons for Cambodia's membership in ASEAN can be understood as an expression of doubt in his past conviction on the role of this regional organisation. It seems that Hun Sen's confidence in ASEAN has gradually faded due to the grouping's ineffective response to the Cambodia-Thailand border conflict from 2008 to 2011. In response to Cambodia's urge for help throughout the border conflict, what ASEAN and its member states did was to encourage Phnom Penh and Bangkok to bilaterally resolve the dispute. In fact, the border dispute was never tabled in the agenda of the ASEAN Summits, till Prime Minister Hun Sen broke from protocol, possibly out of his frustration, and raised the issue at the ASEAN Summit in Jakarta in May 2011.

In contrast, China has emerged as the biggest provider of military assistance to Cambodia. Noticeably, China's military assistance increased remarkably at the time when Cambodia badly needed to build up its defence forces during the Cambodia-Thailand border dispute. As mentioned in the previous chapter, most of the weapons that the Cambodian armed forces used to push back Thailand's military aggressiveness were Chinese. Cambodia's access to Chinese weapons supply was quick with concessional prices.[69] As China's importance for Cambodia has rapidly increased, foreign policymakers in Phnom Penh realised that China is not a threat but a protector of Cambodia's sovereignty and territorial integrity, ensured on many occasions by Chinese top leaders. More importantly, China, not ASEAN, has become Cambodia's largest foreign investor and biggest economic benefactor (see Chapter 7).

Cambodia on the South China Sea: from a passive to a proactive position

Clearly, the South China Sea constitutes today's most difficult foreign policy dilemma for Cambodia because ASEAN and China are both important for the Kingdom's security and economic development. By tracking Cambodia's changing positions on the South China Sea, one can comprehend Cambodia's evolving strategic direction towards both ASEAN and China. Prior to the eruption of the 2008–2011 Cambodia-Thailand border dispute, Cambodia's position on the South China Sea had generally been in line with the common stance of ASEAN.[70] There are two possible explanations for Cambodia's cautious position on the South China Sea. First, after the adoption of the DOC, the tension in the disputed areas

subsided as claimant states tried to avoid raising the issue at the ASEAN meetings. Second, when the South China Sea was tabled at the ASEAN meetings, Cambodia had mostly attempted to take a neutral stance and adopted a wait-and-see approach in order not to upset both China and ASEAN claimant states.[71]

The Cambodia-Thailand border dispute altered Cambodia's strategic direction towards ASEAN. As a result, Cambodia's position on the South China Sea changed accordingly. Phnom Penh has abandoned the wait-and-see approach to the South China Sea in favour of a more proactive attitude to protect Cambodian interests, which is not necessarily pro-Chinese but has certainly alienated some ASEAN claimant states. Immediately after assuming the ASEAN Chair in January 2012, Prime Minister Hun Sen reaffirmed Cambodia's neutrality in regional conflicts, including the South China Sea.[72] However, prior to the convening of ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Retreat in Siem Reap in January 2012, the Cambodian Foreign Ministry's spokesman Koy Kuong briefed the press that the South China Sea would not be included on the agenda of the meeting. Noticeably, as Beijing pledged to provide Cambodia almost USD40 million in grants and more than USD30 million in loans during the official visit of President Hu Jintao to Phnom Penh in April 2012, Sry Thamrong, advisor to Prime Minister Hun Sen, said that "both countries agreed that the South China Sea dispute . . . will not officially be a part of the summit's agenda and should not be internationalised."[73] As Hu's state visit took place days before the 20th ASEAN Summit in Phnom Penh, observers were prompted to suggest that "Hu had come to exert pressure on Cambodia as the ASEAN chair to take China's concerns into account and discourage formal discussion of the issue."[74] It was reported that though it was later raised during the ASEAN Summit, "Phnom Penh kept the issue off the formal agenda."[75]

More noticeably, the maritime disputes caused a political crisis during the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting (AMM) in Phnom Penh in July 2012 as the Foreign Ministers failed to issue a joint communiqué for the first time in ASEAN's history. The failure of the 'Phnom Penh Fiasco' has allegedly been interpreted as the result of enormous Chinese pressure on Cambodia, which blocked any mention of the South China Sea in the joint communiqué.[76] To be fair to Cambodia, however, one development that must also be considered while discussing the 'Phnom Penh Fiasco' was the 'American pivot to Asia,' which resulted in increasing tensions in the South China Sea. Controversially, at the ARF meeting in Hanoi in 2010, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton declared publicly that the US has a national interest in the safety of navigation and over flights in the South China Sea. Since then, diplomatic tensions have been unabated in the disputed area. Arguably, the Philippines and Vietnam had been more assertive both in their bilateral negotiations with China and in using ASEAN as a framework to deal with China. Manila and Hanoi might share the same conviction that time was actually on the Chinese side and that it was the right time to exert their claim and make Beijing more amenable due to the fact that China was not yet a full-fledged superpower and, more importantly, that the US was actively reengaged in Asia. Against this backdrop, the division in ASEAN has been exacerbated. Equally importantly, the July 2012 'Phnom Penh Fiasco' was inevitable as the regional context was increasingly complex.

The year 2012 was critical for Beijing, the leadership transition from Hu Jintao/Wen Jiabao to Xi Jinping/Li Keqiang, which put Chinese leaders under enormous pressure not to make any necessary compromise, especially on sensitive issues such as the South China Sea.

The 'Phnom Penh Fiasco' has continuously been used to build the narrative that Cambodia is a spoiled member of ASEAN or a proxy of China in Southeast Asia. In all disagreements within ASEAN on the South China Sea, Cambodia had been quickly blamed as the regional maverick. For instance, at the AMM in Laos in July 2016, Cambodia was reportedly blamed for blocking any mention about the ruling of the ITLOS on the South China Sea, as well as the militarisation in the disputed area. Diplomats leaked to the media the accusation that the deadlock was the repeat of the ASEAN meeting in Phnom Penh in July 2012 while Cambodia was chairing ASEAN.[77] Diplomats and commentators quickly accused that Cambodia had been bought by China by referring to Chinese aid worth about USD600 million that Premier Li Keqiang announced during his meeting with Prime Minister Hun Sen on the sidelines of the 11th Asia-Europe Meeting Summit in Mongolia a week earlier. It was argued that Cambodia "clearly sees relations with China as more important than its membership in ASEAN and is willing to damage ASEAN to aid its relations with China" and that "Cambodia's paralysis on ASEAN hurts ASEAN unity, cohesion, relevance and reputation."[78]

However, other diplomats who attended the AMM in Laos revealed a different picture of what was happening. One diplomat said on condition of anonymity that most ASEAN countries, especially those who had no claims in the South China Sea, wished to stay out of the South China Sea dispute.[79] He went on stating that "no one but the Philippines insisted that the arbitral ruling be included" in the joint communiqué. A Cambodian diplomat said it was "annoying" that Cambodia has always been blamed because the "fire had not started from Cambodia but from the claimant states and the external ones who are disputing or unhappy with China [*sic*]."[80] He continued, saying that

> it was not Cambodia which blocked the release of the joint communiqué, but that the specific wordings demanded by the Philippines and Vietnam were too straight [forward] which was not conducive for China and ASEAN to move forward with full implementation of DOC towards the Code of Conduct.[81]

Upon his return in Phnom Penh, Cambodian Foreign Minister Prak Sokhonn stated that Cambodia had been "treated unfairly by some ASEAN countries and members of the media," which wrongly blamed the country for blocking the joint communiqué.[82] He added that "Cambodia does not benefit from supporting anyone. . . . We just want to be neutral."

According to another Cambodian diplomat, the reason behind the AMM impasse was the lack of a common position within ASEAN related to the ITLOS ruling on the South China Sea, which was further exacerbated by the involvement of the external great powers.[83] The diplomat speculated that China and the US would be trying to influence the smaller ASEAN nations to conform to their

interests and especially to their position on the South China Sea. He also argued that ASEAN was divided and "bullied" by the two super powers, resulting in some ASEAN countries favouring China while the others sided with the US. The sad fact, however, is that all blame has been dumped on Cambodia.[84] Interestingly, the AMM deadlock reached a breakthrough shortly after the arrival of US Secretary of State John Kerry. The Philippines decided to drop its proposed wordings on the tribunal's verdict from the communiqué. Retrospectively, if the Philippines and Vietnam had softened their position during the AMM in Phnom Penh in July 2012, as they did at the ASEAN meeting in Laos, the 'Phnom Penh Fiasco' could have been averted. Moreover, Cambodian diplomats argued that "the Philippines had gone too far in bringing the case to the tribunal as it has created a division within ASEAN and allowed the external great powers to use the verdict to divide ASEAN."[85] Ironically, Phnom Penh has been accused of having gone too far in supporting China's position on the South China Sea. It is argued that the position of Cambodia, along with Laos and Myanmar, on the South China Sea pushed the Philippines to bring the issue to the ITLOS.

This blame game has gone into open-ended discussions. In this context, there is a perception among Cambodian foreign policymakers that Cambodia has been the scapegoat for ASEAN's division on the South China Sea. The South China issue is one of the most sensitive issues in Cambodia's foreign policy. Cambodia's Foreign Ministry had not made public its position on the issue. However, amidst criticism, then Foreign Minister Hor Namhong summoned all 28 heads of diplomatic missions in Phnom Penh to brief them on Cambodia's position on the South China Sea on 8 May 2015. After the closed-door meeting, Secretary of State Seung Rathchavy told the press:

> Cambodia's stance has not changed since the beginning [of the dispute]. It's important that the issue of the South China Sea is resolved by all relevant parties implementing the DOC. . . . The territorial claims have to be resolved by the involved parties. ASEAN cannot resolve this problem because we are not a court which can judge who is right or wrong, or which piece of land or water belongs to which country.[86]

In February 2017, after being frustrated by criticism over Cambodia's pro-China position on the South China Sea, Minister Hun Sen spelled out Phnom Penh's position on the issue which is aimed at (1) continuing the implementation of the DOC; (2) urging ASEAN and China to make utmost effort to finalise the code of conduct (COC); and (3) encouraging countries concerned to discuss a resolution of the issue because "ASEAN is not a court." Prime Minister Hun Sen stated that "ASEAN cannot measure land for them . . . the South China Sea is not an issue between ASEAN and China."[87] Obviously, Cambodia's position on the South China Sea has been similar to that of other ASEAN non-claimant states, including Laos, Thailand, and Myanmar. Unfortunately, Cambodia has always been highlighted negatively when ASEAN faced deadlock on the South China Sea.

Growing pro-ASEAN attitude in Cambodia

Despite the fact that ASEAN has no longer been the cornerstone of Cambodia's foreign policy, there is a consensus within the Cambodian foreign policy community that this regional grouping remains crucial for the Kingdom. Broadly, public opinion in Cambodia on ASEAN, particularly among young foreign-service officers and the country's intelligentsia, is still positive. Two prominent Cambodian IR commentators share the view that despite the declining strategic relevance, ASEAN remains important for Cambodia in terms of economic integration, regional multilateral diplomacy, and human resource development.[88] They share a strong conviction that ASEAN retains its value in Cambodia's foreign policy. Interestingly, during a quick survey the author conducted on 14 October 2017, over 70 per cent of 30 PhD students – mostly in political science and public policy at one university in Phnom Penh – considered ASEAN a very important regional organisation for Cambodia to address its economic and security challenges.

Theoretically, small states might reduce their vulnerability by binding together to increase their relevance and usefulness in shaping regional and international order. In addition to economic opportunities, regionalism provides three security roles: conflict prevention, conflict containment, and conflict termination.[89] Moreover, Stephen Krasner suggests that by joining regional and international organisations and then attempting to influence "the rules of the games" to their favour small states can achieve the primary goal in world politics of attaining power, control, and wealth.[90] Empirically, the relevance of ASEAN regionalism rests on the existence of regional aspirations for security community among ASEAN leaders, the near absence of war between or among ASEAN members, a relatively high degree of political integration at the elite level, and finally the emergence of a sophisticated discourse of regional community.[91] Many would agree that ASEAN's greatest achievements are its prevention of war among its member states, the promotion of prosperity in the region, and its ability to lead multilateral arrangements, including the ARF, APT, and the EAS. Mahbubani and Sng argue:

> ASEAN has brought peace and prosperity to a troubled region, generated inter-civilizational harmony in the most diverse corner of the earth and brought hope to many. It may have also acted as a critical catalyst for China's peaceful rise . . . ASEAN has created an indispensable diplomatic platform that regularly brings all the great powers together, and created conductive environments for the great powers to talk to each other.[92]

In fact, countries in the region, especially small states like Cambodia, have benefited tremendously from the dividends of relative peace and prosperity that ASEAN has generated. ASEAN has facilitated continued dialogue between states whose relations had been ruptured or politicised by events which have created opportunities for "diffuse reciprocity" as well as a considerable range of cooperative activity that buffers intraregional relations from sharper conflicts.[93] Equally importantly, regional institutions, such as ASEAN, can be of importance

in institutional balancing. It is a strategy states attempt to address potential threats not by traditional military means but by the institutionalisation of norms and rules to either socialise a target state with the norms and rules or impose collective pressure and thus constrain the behaviour of the threatening state.[94] According to Kai He, institutional balancing is a soft balancing that can be used to undermine or constrain a threatening power and to "change the power equilibrium to a state' own favour."[95] In this respect, Cambodia needs to be more nimble in utilising ASEAN to check foreign policy behaviour of threatening powers – Thailand and Vietnam – through the promotion of Cambodia's proactive role in the grouping and creation of an effective ASEAN settlement mechanism. ASEAN has also offered Cambodia a pathway to expand its diplomatic outreach towards the major powers in the region, particularly China. Officials at the Cambodian Foreign Ministry argued that Cambodia's strategic weight in the eyes of Chinese strategists has been augmented thanks to its membership in ASEAN. Due to the growing importance of Southeast Asia in Beijing's global power projection, Cambodia's membership in ASEAN has been crucial, as Cambodia's support would significantly serve China's interests in the region. Obviously, after the end of the Cold War, there were countries in Southeast Asia that enjoyed close ties with the US, including two US treaty allies – Thailand and the Philippines – that stood in the way of China's dominance of that part of Asia and might provoke, with the help the US, anti-China movement within ASEAN. Most recently, due to increasing tensions in the South China Sea between China and some ASEAN claimant states, Cambodia's detachment from the anti-China camp within ASEAN, at least, can serve China's interest in this strategically important sea line of communication.

As a result, Cambodian leaders have recently reenergised Cambodia's participation in the ASEAN Community-building process. Prime Minister Hun Sen posted on his Facebook page on 20 January 2017 that "I do not hesitate to say that Cambodia will continue on the ASEAN Road." He expressed his strong belief in the current ASEAN development approaches and his commitment to push for the implementation of ASEAN integration vision and goal in order to realise a "Single Market," a big and important market in Asia, which ensures high competitiveness, equity in development, and full integration to the world. At the 2015 ASEAN Summit in Manila, Prime Minister Hun Sen stated that "Cambodia wishes to reaffirm its unquestionable support for ASEAN's commitment to the ASEAN centrality in the evolving regional and global architecture and the intensified effort to deepen ASEAN integration."[96] Similarly, Cambodian Foreign Minister Prak Sokkhon stated:

> Apart from economic integration, Cambodia also received opportunities to play an international role in setting the agenda for peace and prosperity of the region. Within this role, Cambodia has contributed to further increase engagement with external partners that helps maintain ASEAN's centrality and keep ASEAN in the driver's seat.[97]

Most recently, Prime Minister Hun Sen spoke highly of ASEAN as Cambodia was celebrating the twentieth anniversary of its membership in the regional grouping

on 30 April 2019. He noted that "Since its inception on 8 August 1967, ASEAN has prompted many optimistic narratives that have brought hope to some 650 million people in Southeast Asia and to many more far beyond the region."[98] Hun Sen continued to say:

> ASEAN has provided a reliable security shield for its member states to protect its independence and sovereignty. . . . The success of ASEAN rests on its open, inclusive and outward-looking nature while its principles of consensus-based decision making, non-interference and equal sovereignty were the foundations of ASEAN unity. Resistance and defiance against foreign interference has been and will continue to be a core principle of ASEAN in continued engagement on the basis of mutually beneficial and common interest with Dialogue Partners and External Parties will remain its key outward looking principle. Cambodia adheres fully to these core ASEAN principles.[99]

Conclusion

While the perceived threats from Thailand and Vietnam pushed Cambodia to form an alignment with China, Phnom Penh's worldview of the future Sino-centric regional order in Asia has consolidated the alignment. Cambodian foreign policymakers are increasingly convinced that their country's alignment with China would be the best strategic option that enables their small Kingdom to promote its economic prosperity and to safeguard its territorial integrity and survival. Accordingly, Cambodia's foreign policy towards ASEAN and China has proved to be unbalanced in favour of the latter. Due to ASEAN's ineffective response to the 2008–2011 Cambodia-Thailand border conflict, the regional grouping ceased to be the cornerstone of Cambodia's foreign policy. Tellingly, Cambodia has no longer shied away from confronting other ASEAN member states in order to defend its interests, even at the risk of alienating them. The most luminous example is Cambodia's position on the South China Sea, which has shifted from a passive attitude towards a more proactive approach. As a result, Cambodia alienated some ASEAN member states, especially the Philippines and Vietnam, when it assumed the ASEAN Chairmanship in 2012. This has been used to build the narrative that Cambodia is China's proxy in ASEAN.

However, there is a foreign policy consensus in Cambodia that ASEAN remains important for Cambodia. Lately, Prime Minister Hun Sen and his Foreign Minister Prak Sokkhon have reiterated Cambodia's commitment to neutrality and non-alignment as well as to the building of the ASEAN Community. Finding a way to reconcile between Cambodia's alignment with China and its participation in the ASEAN integration is now a foreign policy challenge and a strategic puzzle for Phnom Penh. Therefore, the future prospect of Cambodia's current alignment with China will depend on at least three factors. First, as Cambodia's increasing alignment with China is the result of its fear of security threats from Thailand and Vietnam, the future prospect of Cambodia-China

relations depends on the foreign policy behaviour of these two regional powers towards Cambodia. Second, ASEAN's future economic and security importance for its members will be crucial in shaping Cambodia's strategic direction. The higher Cambodia's confidence in ASEAN develops, the more flexibility the Kingdom will enjoy vis-à-vis its relations with the great powers, including China. Third, China's foreign policy approach towards Cambodia is also crucial for the Kingdom's future strategic directions. If the costs from Cambodia's alignment outweigh the benefits, Phnom Penh might have to opt for a different approach.

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6 Cambodia and major powers

Limited strategic options

Empirically, small states tend to seek support and assistance from external power(s) in order to overcome security threats, as they cannot always withstand the threats on their own. The option that small states select depends primarily on the distribution of power among major powers in their immediate region and the conviction that the major powers are willing and able to render credible support for their security and survival. Cambodia has been persistent in applying this strategy, as discussed in Chapter 2. Contemporarily, as China's power and influence grows, Phnom Penh's alignment with Beijing has developed. However, as a small state, Cambodia has to face strategic dilemmas arising from its asymmetric relations with China. One the one hand, Cambodia needs China for economic development and security protection, both from traditional and non-traditional threats. One the other hand, as the result of strengthening ties with Beijing, Cambodia might run risk of eroding its foreign policy autonomy and alienating neighbours (Vietnam and other ASEAN members due to growing tension in the South China Sea) and other major powers that are engaged in strategic competitions with a rising China.

Therefore, the Cambodian government has made efforts to diversify Cambodia's foreign relations with other major powers in order to enable Cambodia to avert the potential risks and the challenges arising from its alignment with China. Having said that, Cambodia's options in alignment politics with other major powers are limited. The US and Japan are ideal hedging powers for Cambodia to address the challenges and risks deriving from its increasing alignment with China. However, Cambodia's strategic cooperation with the US is inconceivable due to the strategic misalignment and trust deficit between leaders in Phnom Penh and Washington. As for Japan, Shinzo Abe's proactive diplomacy towards Southeast Asia presents a good opportunity for Cambodia's strategic configuration. As a result, Phnom Penh and Tokyo upgraded Cambodia-Japan bilateral relationship into a 'Strategic Partnership' in December 2013. However, in the eyes of Cambodian foreign policymakers Japan's military and strategic role in the region is limited due to its pacifist constitution and perceived lack of foreign policy independence from the US. The Cambodian government has also promoted its ties with France and Russia. Yet, Cambodian foreign policymakers perceive that these two major powers can play only a symbolic role as Cambodia's former patrons

for the important reason that they lack both willingness and capacity to help the Kingdom to meet its security and economic needs.

Japan in Cambodia's strategic configuration

Shinzo Abe's new ASEAN diplomacy has added more dynamism to the strategic recalibration of countries in Southeast Asia as well as to the regional security environment, which has been characterised by the strategic competition between China and the US. As Japan is proactively engaged in Southeast Asia via its support for ASEAN centrality and strengthened relationships with individual regional countries, ASEAN and its member states have more strategic tools in their disposal in dealing with a rising China. Abe's proactive diplomacy towards Southeast Asia has also presented Cambodia with a strategic window of opportunity to form a more nuanced foreign policy. As a result, Phnom Penh has markedly promoted its bilateral relations with Tokyo as part of its endeavour to diversify its alignment politics. In fact, Japan has been considered the most important hedging power of Cambodia against the risks and challenges arising from its increasingly close ties with China due to Tokyo's crucially important role in the peace-making and post-conflict peace-building processes in Cambodia. Therefore, it can be argued that although China has been and will be the most important strategic partner of Cambodia, the strategic partnership with Tokyo signals Phnom Penh's strategic concern of being over-dependent on Beijing.

Abe's new ASEAN diplomacy

One year after Shinzo Abe's re-assumption of the Japanese premiership in December 2012, he started his charm offensive towards Southeast Asia. Abe was the first Japanese Prime Minster to visit all of the ASEAN nations, which illustrates the importance of this region for Japan in general and for his administration in particular. During his visit to Jakarta in January 2013, Abe unveiled the five principles of Japan's New ASEAN diplomacy: (1) establishing and expanding universal values such as freedoms, democracy, and basic human rights; (2) protecting the free and open seas as common goods and thus welcoming the American rebalancing to the Asia-Pacific; (3) further promoting flows of trade and investment; (4) protecting and nurturing Asia's diverse cultures; and (5) actively promoting exchanges among younger generation.[1] Then Foreign Minister Kishida Fumio noted that as the strategic environment has profoundly changed, Japan must assume a "responsible role that secures prosperity and security," by among other things further strengthening cooperative relations with ASEAN.[2] It is clear that Japan's engagement in Southeast Asia under the Abe administration has shifted from a purely economic-social approach to a more political and security one. According to Nirmala, there are at least three main objectives of Japan's proactive engagement of Southeast Asia, namely: (1) maintaining the status quo in the South China Sea, which serves Japan's economic and security interests; (2) containing China's aggressive and assertive behaviour; and (3) exerting greater influence in the region.[3]

To this end, the Abe administration has, first of all, used Japan's weight in multilateral forums to balance China's influence. For instance, Abe was explicit in explaining China's recent behaviour in the East China Sea at the ASEAN-Japan Summit on 22 November 2015. He directly pointed out China's encroachment by its vessels and its unilateral development in the disputed maritime border with Japan. Similarly, it was reported that the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus in late 2015, could not produce a joint declaration due to disagreement over the South China Sea among the member states, including Japan. Japan has also further promoted ASEAN's centrality and unity by respecting its consultation and consensus decision-making process with the belief that if ASEAN is not united politically, China might be able to pursue a "divide-and-rule" strategy towards Southeast Asia.[4] In his address in Singapore on 26 July 2013, Abe expressed his delight that

> ASEAN and Japan have gone beyond their economic relations to forge a relationship that takes on responsibility for the security of the region, particularly freedom of navigation. . . . ASEAN, as a special partner for Japan, has also been at the centre of this policy.[5]

Second, Tokyo has also been eager to create bilateral strategic partnerships with ASEAN members. The predecessors of the Abe administration had established the strategic partnerships with only four ASEAN members – Indonesia, Vietnam, the Philippines and Thailand.[6] Since Abe took office in December 2012, Japan has concluded strategic partnerships with Cambodia in 2013, and Malaysia and Laos in 2015, as well as upgrading its existing strategic partnership with Vietnam to an "Extensive Strategic Partnership" in 2014. In this respect, although a strategic partnership falls short of a mutual defence pact, it entails defence cooperation that Japan has been able to conduct maritime capacity-building, to provide defence equipment and to establish defence dialogue at the foreign and defence ministerial levels.

Thirdly, the Abe administration has created a new development programme, the "Partnership for Quality Infrastructure: Initiative for Asia's Future," which was announced in May 2015. Under this scheme, Japan increased its infrastructure investment in Asia by approximately 30 per cent, amounting to USD110 billion for the next year five. This programme is strategically important in the context of the establishment of AIIB. The Japanese government perceived that China had the potential to enhance its political influence over Southeast Asian states, and thus Japan's new programmes aimed to counter the AIIB influence.[7] In terms of trade and investment, Japan remains a key partner of ASEAN. Bilateral trade between the two sides reached USD217.9 billion in 2017, making Japan ASEAN's fourth biggest trading partner.[8] In the same year, Japan was ASEAN's second largest external source of FDI, with a total investment of USD13.2 billion. Moreover, as China's political influence and economic presence continued to grow in the Mekong region, Tokyo has revitalised its engagement in the region. At the 7th Mekong-Japan Summit on 4 July 2015 in Tokyo, the "New Tokyo Strategy 2015 for Mekong-Japan Cooperation," was adopted. Prime Minister Abe also pledged

to provide JPY750 billion in ODA to support the countries in the region for 2016–2018 in four key areas: industrial infrastructure development and hard connectivity, industrial human resource development and soft connectivity, sustainable development towards the realisation of a green Mekong, and development policy coordination.[9] Japanese leaders have always emphasised that Japan's engagement in the Mekong region aims to contribute to regional development with 'quality infrastructure,' 'quality growth,' and 'social cohesive and responsibility.' These catchphrases can be understood as an attack to China's engagement in the region, which has been accused of compromising quality of work, labour and environmental standards, and business ethics as discussed in Chapter 5.

Finally, Abe has tried to revive a strategic concept he articulated before the Indian Parliament in 2007 entitled "Confluence of the Two Seas" – a vision of a region based on common values, such as democracy, freedom, and respect for liberal democratic values.[10] This vision is now known as the Indo-Pacific concept, which has recently gained significant traction among the policy community in Australian, Japan, the US, and India – members of the Quadrilateral Dialogue or the Quad, which was set up in 2007. In August 2016, Prime Minister Abe declared a 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific' (FOIP) strategy with the objective of promoting infrastructure and proactive peace for the region, combining Asia and Africa's dynamism, and expanding regional integration along the Indian and Pacific Oceans coastlines.[11] Officially, Japan's FOIP entails 3 pillars that are most beneficial to the region are rule of law, connectivity, and peace.[12] From a geopolitical perspective, one can argue that this enterprise is to counter China's rising power, including its BRI, and to address the uncertainty of the US security commitment in Asia.

Strategic partnership with Japan: Cambodia's search for autonomy

As Abe's proactive diplomacy towards ASEAN and the Mekong region intensifies, Cambodia-Japan bilateral ties have been strengthened. Cambodia and Japan share a long history of contact and interaction dating back to the Angkor era. Contemporarily, Cambodia and Japan established the diplomatic relations on 9 January 1953. In 1955, Phnom Penh and Tokyo signed the "Treaty of Amity" between Cambodia and Japan. The two countries have maintained a close dialogue and cooperation at various levels which leaders of both countries call "heart-to-heart relationship." Pou and Imagawa note that in July 1989, "Japan played a prominent role in the preliminary negotiations that led to the Paris International Conference on Cambodia, and in October 1991, co-chaired this with France, concluding successfully with the signing of the Paris Peace Agreements on Cambodia."[13] After the Paris Peace Agreements in 1991, Japan has been playing a crucially important role in Cambodia's peace-building and socio-economic development. Since 1992, Japan has been the biggest and longest provider of bilateral ODA to Cambodia. As of 2013, Japan disbursed to Cambodia a total ODA of USD2.374 billion.[14] Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) has played an important role in supporting

the development of Cambodia through technical cooperation on a broad range of areas, including rehabilitation and reconstruction of infrastructure, poverty alleviation, good governance and the rule of law, human resource development, human security and the integration of Cambodia into the region and the world.

During Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's visit to Cambodia in November 2013, Japan provided around USD4.5 million of grant aid for mine clearance in Cambodia and USD1.8 million assistance to the Khmer Rouge Tribunal for 2014. In 2015, Japan provided almost USD67.5 million of grant aid and USD146.6 million of loan to Cambodia in efforts to improve drinking water supply, speed up demining activities, upgrade physical infrastructure, and promote human resource development in Cambodia.[15] In 2016, Japanese grant aid to Cambodia increased to USD85 million while loan amounted to USD98 million.[16] Cambodia-Japan economic relations have also been strengthened. As of December 2016, 250 Japanese companies have invested in Cambodia with the total investment of USD803 million, which made Japan Cambodia's second largest investor. The bilateral trade between the two countries also increased from around USD905 million in 2014 to USD1.35 billion in 2016.[17]

Diplomatically, Cambodia and Japan have maintained and promoted their cordial bilateral ties through frequent exchanges of high-level visits and mutual support at regional and international forums. Since 2000, four Japanese Prime Ministers have paid their official visits to Cambodia.[18] For his part, Prime Minister Hun Sen has visited Japan ten times since 1999. As strategic partners, Cambodia and Japan have also promoted their political and military cooperation through 'Politico-Military Consultation' and 'Military-Military Consultation.' Since 2010, Phnom Penh and Tokyo have convened four 'Politico-Military Consultation' meetings, led by the Foreign Ministries of the two countries, and four 'Military-Military Consultation' meetings, led by the Defence Ministries.[19] At a glance, the promotion of the Cambodia-Japan relationship is the by-product of a shift of Japan's foreign policy under Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in order to prevent any further deterioration of his country's geopolitical role, partly due to the rise of China. As for Cambodia, the establishment of a strategic partnership with Japan goes beyond Japan's significant economic role in the Kingdom. It also reflects Phnom Penh's diplomatic, political and strategic reconfiguration. First, in the aftermath of Cambodia's Chairmanship of ASEAN, particularly the failure of the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Phnom Penh in July 2012, Cambodia has been unfairly seen as a 'proxy' or a 'client state' of China in Southeast Asia. In response, Cambodian leaders have repeatedly claimed that Cambodia has always upheld neutrality and non-alignment and that the Kingdom enjoys full foreign policy autonomy, presumably from China. Therefore, the strategic partnership with Japan, announced days after China declared its Air Defence Identification Zone over the East Asia China in December 2013, could be seen as Cambodia's diplomatic efforts to rectify its image.

Second, Phnom Penh has closely observed Beijing's apparent hedging strategy towards political developments in Myanmar since 2011. Prior to the November

2015 general election in Myanmar, Beijing engaged various actors in the country's political landscape, including the then opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi. The objective was to hedge its bets on the country's political future, which has been proved to be a right strategy due to the National League of Democracy's landslide victory in the 2015 elections. In this respect, Prime Minister Hun Sen and his advisors have been concerned about China's political support for the CPP given the increasingly growing popularity of the CNRP. After Cambodia's elections in July 2013, Beijing immediately recognised the results and congratulated Prime Minister Hun Sen for the CPP's victory. However, as anti-government protests led by the CNRP grew in the weeks that followed, China largely remained silent. Therefore, it is clear that Phnom Penh's diversifying of Cambodia's foreign relations with other major powers, particularly with Japan, could be seen as an attempt to hedge against China's lukewarm political support for the CPP. In addition, the general public in Cambodia is more receptive to Japan's image and contribution to the promotion of the democracy, the rule of law, good governance, and quality economic engagement in Cambodia, in comparison to China's. Therefore, the close relations between Cambodia and Japan, and Tokyo's political support for the CPP are crucial the legitimacy and image of the ruling party in Cambodia.

Thirdly, Cambodia's efforts to strengthen its ties with Japan have something to do with a Phnom Penh's long-term strategic vision. By all accounts, as a small state, Cambodia has to face strategic dilemmas as the result of its asymmetric relations with China. Therefore, it can be argued that Cambodia's strategic partnership with Japan is Phnom Penh's attempt to diversify its foreign relations with more major powers, and thus delicately balance its alignment with Beijing. In a noticeable move, Phnom Penh allowed the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA) to take a 13.5 per cent equity stake in Cambodia's Port Authority Sihanoukville (PAS) in June 2017.[20] As a major stakeholder, JICA is playing an important role in managing Cambodia's largest and only deep-sea port that Japan has helped develop since 1999. The Japanese government has provided a concessional loan of around USD209 million for the construction of a new container terminal at Sihanoukville port.[21] A senior official at the Cambodian Ministry of Economic and Finance argues that JICA's involvement in the PAS is Phnom Penh's calculus move to diversify Cambodia's strategic asset.[22]

Equally importantly, Prime Minister Hun Sen was one of the first heads of states/governments of ASEAN members to express a strong support for Japan's FOIP during his official visit to Japan in August 2017. It is worth mentioning that Chinese leaders and the media have warned against an attempt by the Quad powers to contain China. Containment has become a buzzword in Beijing's understanding of the Quad and the Indo-Pacific strategy. After the Quad meeting in November 2017, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman cautioned that regional cooperation should be neither politicised nor exclusionary. In March 2018, Foreign Minister Wang Yi dismissed it as an "attention-grabbing idea" that will "dissipate like ocean foam." Scepticism among Chinese think tanks and the media on the Indo-Pacific concept is even worse as they see the concept is merely the containment strategy against China. Liu Zongyi argues that "if the US aims to contain China by creating

a maritime alliance to counter China's political economic and military influence then this Indo-Pacific policy will bring more conflict and turmoil to the region."[23] The Global Times sees Japan's FOIP as Abe's strategy attempts to suppress China's maritime rights by organising alliances with India, Australia, South Korea and Southeast Asia and Pacific countries through the so-called 'values-based diplomacy.'[24] In this connection, Thomas S. Wilkins argues:

> By cutting through the fuzzy ideological notions of a coming "Indo-Pacific Century" Beijing surmises that this rediscovery of the "Indo-Pacific" as a regional construct – specially by the "quad" countries portends the effective opening of a new arena of geopolitical rivalry aimed at countering or containing its own expanding ambitions. . . . Beijing is not fooled by the dissimulation of the idea with its manifestation as the quadrilateral geopolitical enterprise.[25]

Amidst Beijing's scepticism and criticism of FOIP, Phnom Penh's receptive attitude towards this strategic initiative implies that it has engaged in a hedging strategy to create strategic space for Cambodia's foreign policy flexibility. According to sources at the Cambodia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Prime Minister Hun Sen's endorsement of Japan's FOIP signifies Cambodia's increasing effort to exert its foreign policy autonomy from China and the strategic importance of Japan for the Kingdom. However, the problem for Japan in the eyes of Cambodian foreign policymakers is that Tokyo's military and strategic role in the region is limited due to a number of factors. First, Japan's pacifist constitution of 1947 has constrained the country's military and security role in the Asia-Pacific. Despite Abe's attempts to revise the pacifist constitution, Cambodian strategists are not very convinced that Japan would play a significant role in the security landscape of Asia. Moreover, Japan is not a permanent member of the UNSC that cannot exert significant political role in the region and the world as a whole. For Phnom Penh, the UNSC is the most important international body on the issues of war and peace, illustrated by its constructive role during the Cambodia-Thailand border conflict, as discussed in Chapter 4. Moreover, the support from the members of the UNSC, particularly the permanent members of the Council, is of paramount importance for Cambodia to minimise risks of political interference and subversion as well as military intervention of foreign powers.

Second, there is the perception among Cambodian leaders that Japan lacks foreign policy independence from the US. There is a concern that the US might press Tokyo to promote American interests in Cambodia, even at the expense of Japan's strategic interests. On top of that, Beijing's diplomacy based on 'no-strings attached' financial largeness and the principle of non-interference into political affairs of other states has been more effective in buying friends in Phnom Penh than Tokyo's values-based foreign policy that emphasises on Japan's role in the promotion of democracy, good governance, decentralisation and sustainable development in Cambodia. From an economic and business perspective, some CPP leaders have expressed their frustration over the lack of divisiveness from the

Japanese business community in securing investment opportunities as well as the slow implementation of their investment projects in Cambodia. All in all, Phnom Penh is now implementing a delicate balancing strategy towards both Beijing and Tokyo, by keeping neutral on issues over which China and Tokyo are at odds. But if Phnom Penh is forced to make an ultimate clear choice, say on the East China Sea, China would prevail.

The US: why it cannot be a hedging power for Cambodia?

Generally, the US has been an indispensable force for regional peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific. The US has been placed high in strategic calculus of most countries in the region. Some Cambodian scholars have been advocating that Phnom Penh should adopt balanced foreign policy towards China and the US; and some even suggest that Cambodia should develop a strategic cooperation with the US.[26] The fact of the matter is that a balanced approach towards Beijing and Washington is inconceivable for Cambodia, at least in the near future. In addition to Phnom Penh's worldview that the future of Asia will be Sino-centric, as discussed in the previous chapter, there remains a hug gap in Cambodia-US relations. This gap is the result of the strategic misalignment between the two nations and the trust deficit between leaders in Phnom Penh and Washington.

The lack of strategic convergence

Cambodia and the US established diplomatic relations on 11 July 1950, three years before Cambodia was officially granted its independence from France. Since then, Cambodia-US bilateral ties have experienced abrupt changes, as discussed in Chapter 2. Diplomatic relations deteriorated in the early 1960s as a result of US military involvement in South Vietnam and Phnom Penh's decision to sever its diplomatic ties with Washington on 3 May 1965.[27] Diplomatic ties were assumed in July 1969, severed again after the Khmer Rouge took power in April 1975 and re-established in 1991. In the aftermath of factional fighting in Phnom Penh on 5–6 July 1997, the US suspended its aid and military assistance to the Cambodian government and opposed loans by international financial institutions with the exception of funds for basic humanitarian needs.[28] Cambodia-US relations have been promoted since 2007 after the US congress lifted the sanctions due in part to improving democratisation in Cambodia.[29] As a part of the American pivot to Asia, the Obama Administration took further steps to broaden engagement with Cambodia, partly in response to China's growing diplomatic and economic influence in Cambodia and the lower Mekong Delta region.

Diplomatically, US high-level officials frequently visited Cambodia.[30] For instance, then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton paid an official visit to Phnom Penh in October 2010 – the first visit by a US Secretary of State in seven years. Most importantly, 2012 witnessed a series of high-level meetings between Cambodian and US leaders. In November 2012, President Barack Obama became the first incumbent US president to visit Cambodia to attend the US-ASEAN Leaders'

Meeting and the EAS. Other high-level visits during the year included the visits of Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Secretary of Defence Leon Panetta, and US Trade Representative Ron Kirk. Three high-level visits by US leaders in Cambodia occurred in 2015, including by Minority Leader of the US House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi and the US First Lady Michelle Obama separately in March 2015, and by Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Asia Pacific Daniel Russell in January 2015. Senior officials of the US State Department have continued to visit Cambodia, including Secretary of State John Kerry's visit in January 2016.

Militarily, the US government has maintained a small but sustainable level of engagement with the Cambodian military since 2006, in part to maintain a degree of leverage in the Kingdom. US military engagement in Cambodia includes naval port visits, joint exercises related to international peacekeeping, civic action and humanitarian activities and maritime security, and military assistance.[31] From 2007 to 2012, eight US naval ships made port calls in Cambodia and engaged in joint military exercises with Royal Cambodian Armed Forces (RCAF). Cambodia and the US also jointly conducted bilateral peacekeeping exercises – the Angkor Sentinel – in Cambodia three years in the row from 2010 to 2013. The RCAF has also been invited to take part in the Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training since 2010. Since 2006, Washington has provided military assistance to Cambodia in a programme called "International Military Education and Training," focusing on English-language, leadership training, military professionalism, human rights awareness, and counterterrorism. In 2014, the US allocated USD0.45 million to this programme.

Economically, the US is the largest foreign market for Cambodian goods, mostly apparels, which account for about half of the country's garment exports – an industry that employs approximately 700,000 workers in the Kingdom. The US investment in Cambodia has steadily increased with a total investment of about UDS300 million in 2015.[32] Cambodia is also the fifth-largest recipient of US foreign aid in Southeast Asia after Indonesia, the Philippines, Vietnam and Myanmar.[33] In 2014, the US provided assistance worth of USD70.9 million, mostly to NGOs and humanitarian programmes in Cambodia. Most of US aid to Cambodia has been channelled largely through NGOs, with main focuses on health, education, good governance, and the promotion of democracy. At the sub-regional level, the Lower Mekong Initiative (LMI), launched in 2009 by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, is a regional foreign assistance effort through which the US aims to promote cooperation and capacity-building with lower Mekong countries, such as Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam, in the areas of agriculture and food security, connectivity, education, energy security, the environment and water management, and health. The State Department provided USD14.3 million for the LMI in 2014.[34]

Although Cambodia-US relations have recently been strengthened, there is an underlying impediment for Cambodia and the US, preventing them from developing a deeper bilateral relationship. This is a strategic divergence between the two countries. Phnom Penh is of the view that "Cambodia has never been in American strategic interest in Asia" and that the White

House has always "preferred Thailand and Vietnam to Cambodia."[35] That can be explained by that fact that the US government has never extended the invitation for an official visit to Prime Minister Hun Sen or even to his Foreign Minister. It is worth noticing that Hor Namhong's visit to Washington in June 2012 was a working visit when Cambodia had assumed the ASEAN Chairmanship. Similarly, Prime Minister Hun Sen's participation in the US-ASEAN Special Summit in Sunnylands, California, in February 2016 was not his official visit to the US. Given the history of animosity in the region and recent border disputes Cambodia has endured with its neighbours – with Thailand in 2008–2011 and ongoing tensions with Vietnam – the US is certainly not an ideal great power in Cambodia's alignment politics. Certainly, Cambodia's choice has been clear, that is China. As China and the US experienced tensions related to President Trump's tough-talking rhetoric on 'One-China' policy, potential trade war with China and the South China Sea issue, Cambodia surprised everyone in January 2017, when it announced the cancellation of Angkor Sentinel military exercises with the US for 2017 and 2018. It is worth noticing that the cancellation was announced a month after the first-ever military joint exercise between Cambodia and China – Golden Dragon – featuring more than 500 Chinese soldiers.[36] It is argued that Cambodia's decision to scrap the joint exercise with the US reflects Cambodia's understanding of "the new course of regional geopolitics where China is winning in Southeast Asia."[37] Similarly, John Ciorciari said:

> Cambodia would like to remain engaged with the US, which continues to be one of its top importers of garments and footwear, sectors that make up 80 percent of Cambodia's exports, but only as long Cambodia was able to maintain China's favour. . . . If Sino-American tension rises, Hun Sen will bend further toward Beijing, the partner that does most to secure his position in power.[38]

Trust deficit between Phnom Penh and Washington

Apparently, suspicion and misperception among the leadership in Phnom Penh towards Washington remain strong due to historical memories, perceived US interference in Cambodia's politics, and alleged American double standards vis-à-vis the promotion of democratic values and the respect for human rights and freedoms. Most top leaders of Cambodia, including Prime Minister Hun Sen, joined the underground communist movement against the US-supported Lon Nol regime (1973–1975). In fact, the so-called "anti-American imperialism" was their political background. Thereafter, while the PRK, later named the State of Cambodia, was busy with the fight against the return of the Khmer Rouge and the reconstruction of Cambodia, this regime was isolated and embargoed by the West from 1979–1991. In addition, Cambodia's historical memories of its colonial past and foreign powers' intervention during the Cold War have left Cambodian leaders very respectful of their country's sovereignty. In their worldview, therefore,

the US has been and remains a "bullying" superpower that is willing to interfere in the domestic affairs of small states. Controversially, there is a strong perception in Phnom Penh that the US has been engaged in a "regime change" campaign in Cambodia. A senior member of the ruling CPP explained:

> Since 1993, US diplomacy has been interfering in Cambodia's political life by supporting the opposition with financial and human resources. It is funding local and American NGOs in an attempt to destabilize the country and to change the regime through the process of a "colour revolution". Since 1998, during every national election, crews have been sent by the US undercovert operations to help the political opposition and to try to create divisions among the Cambodian people.[39]

In the aftermath of the 2013 Cambodian election, the ruling CPP has floated the idea that a 'colour revolution' with foreign powers' support has been unfolding in the Kingdom. The Cambodian government has occasionally urged Western Powers to respect Cambodia's sovereignty and independence and not to meddle in the country's domestic affairs. For instance, in response to a comment by the US Ambassador to Cambodia on a controversial Draft Law on Associations and Non-Governmental Organisations (LANGO) in a local newspaper on 19 May 2015, the Cambodian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation said that "the words expressed by a foreign ambassador to Cambodia are extremely insolent, even if he is the representative of a big country."[40] More noticeably, Hun Sen called on the military to "absolutely ensure that Cambodia is free from any colour revolutions" on his Facebook page in November 2016, writing that they would "harm people's happiness and peace in Cambodia" and that "the armed forces shall protect the legitimate government."[41] On 26 April 2017, the Press and Quick Reaction Unit of Cambodia's Office of the Council of Ministers released an 18-minute video, showing footage of the devastation caused by the war in Syria and quoting a young Syrian man who had called for a revolution expressing regret at having done so. In a statement, Council of Ministers spokesman Phay Siphan said the video is meant to inform the public about "the consequences of a colour revolution initiated by a political group with foreign interventions."[42] The government and CPP surrogates have lashed out at the US over its interference into Cambodia's domestic affairs by supporting the position party and funding unfriendly NGOs to the Hun Sen government. On 11 April 2017, Cambodia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs released an 11-page document titled "Cambodia, Democracy and Human Rights: To Tell the Truth," which lobs accusations of interference at various external actors, mostly pointedly the US.[43]

For the American side, in the eyes of political elites in Washington, the Hun Sen government is, in the words of Republican lawmaker Steve Chabot during the Congressional Hearing in July 2013, "authoritarian, corrupt political system."[44] In the aftermath of the 2013 election, US Lawmakers and human rights activists were pushing for a cut in USD70 million in annual US aid that the US had pledged to give to Cambodia if Prime Minister Hun Sen would extend his rule in what they

called "unfair elections."[45] US Rep. Ed Royce, Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, issued a statement:

> Hun Sen has brought Cambodia to the brink. No longer content to marginalize the opposition, the Cambodian People's Party (CPP) is now killing peaceful protesters. It's time for Hun Sen to end his three-decade grip on power and step down. The people of Cambodia deserve far better.[46]

In a similar tone, Republican Lawmaker Dana Rohrabacher said, "Hun Sen is a corrupt, vicious human being, who has held that country in his grip for decades. . . . It's time for Hun Sen to go."[47] Such a perception might exist within the White House's foreign policymakers. More importantly, the White House has also been constrained by American bureaucratic politics in dealing with Cambodia's conundrum – human rights versus strategic interests. For example, in the wake of Obama's visit to Cambodia in November 2012, a dozen US lawmakers – Republicans and Democrats alike, including Senator John McCain – sent a toughly worded letter calling President Obama to publicly address human rights issues with Prime Minister Hun Sen.[48] Some Human Rights groups urged the US president not to meet with Prime Minister Hun Sen. As a result, President Obama briefly met with Prime Minister Hun Sen and US officials called the meeting "usual protocol for a US President on the sidelines of an EAS summit."[49] President Obama reportedly focused on human rights issues and urged Prime Minister Hun Sen to release political prisoners and allow opposition parties greater freedom. Washington's tough stance on the Hun Sen regime is also due to the complicated foreign policy making process in the US, where interest groups, like think tanks, the media and human rights activists, are relatively influential. Cambodian Americans who are generally critics of Hun Sen's Government also have some influence that American politicians cannot ignore. As of the 2010 US census, there are 276,667 people of Cambodian descent living in the US, concentrated in the states of California and Massachusetts.[50] As a result, US lawmakers representing the two states tend to be more critical towards the Hun Sen government.

Finally, Cambodian foreign policymakers have been frustrated by the double standards of American foreign policy in Cambodia and in other parts of the world under the name of democracy and human rights. Throughout the Cold War, Washington purported to stand for freedom, democracy, human rights, and non-interference in the internal affairs of other societies, but at the same time, it helped stage coups and took other measures to destabilise governments, even the democratic ones, that were deemed insufficiently supportive of American regional or global objectives.[51] Throughout the Cold War, the US had supported the dictatorship regimes in Southeast Asia, such as Marcos in the Philippines, Suharto in Indonesia and a number of military juntas in Thailand with the aim of protecting its strategic interests in the region, rather than its moral values. Recently, Cambodian leaders felt mistreated by Washington compared to their counterparts in the region and claimed that the Cambodian people have enjoyed no less peace, prosperity, and a greater democratic space. For instance, while Cambodian leaders

have never been invited to pay official visit to the US, Washington rolled the red carpet in 2017 for Gen. Prayut Chan-o-cha, the military junta leader of Thailand, and Nguyen Xuan Phuc, the Prime Minister of the Communist State of Vietnam.

It was initially thought that Cambodia-US relations would be improved under the Trump administration due to the belief in Phnom Penh that Trump would focus less on the promotion of human rights and democracy around the world. Strangio argues that "for years, Hun Sen has been frustrated by the constant lectures by Western governments about how he runs his country."[52] Prime Minister Hun Sen was among a few world leaders who endorsed presidential candidate Trump. However, Cambodia-US relations turned sour during the first month of the Trump presidency over debt issue. The US Ambassador to Cambodia William Heidt requested the Cambodian government to "start planning how to pay back a loan from the 1970s now worth USD500 million."[53] Since the election of President Trump, Hun Sen has publicly lobbied the US government to cancel the debt, which he called 'dirty debt' fuelling the factional conflicts in Cambodia. As the US urged Phnom Penh to pay the debt, Cambodians have responded with outrage. Hun Sen lashed out that "The US dropped bombs on our heads and then they ask us to repay. When we do not repay, they tell the IMF [International Monetary Fund] not to lend us money."[54] One truth in Cambodia's history is that, while the US was backing the Lon Nol government, it was conducting a carpet-bombing campaign in the Cambodian countryside where over 500,000 tons of explosives were dropped, killing hundreds of thousands of civilians and leaving a legacy of unexploded ordnances. James Pringle, a Reuters journalist who covered the region's conflicts in the 1970s, agrees that "During the Vietnam War, Americans killed children with abandon over Cambodia. . . . Cambodia does not owe a brass farthing to the US to help in destroying its people, its wild animals, its rice fields and forest cover."[55] An American correspondent Elizabeth Becker, who witnessed the Khmer Rouge's crime against humanity, has also written that "the US owes Cambodia more in war debts that can be repaid in cash."[56] Clearly, the debt issue revived the Cambodians' memory of the US war in Indochina and its interference into Cambodia's domestic politics. Such negative perception continues to shape Cambodia's foreign policy towards the US.

Cambodia's strengthened ties with other major powers: France and Russia

Cambodia has also attempted to diversify its relations with other major powers, noticeably France and Russia, as illustrated by frequent visits by Cambodian leaders to the two countries. Phnom Penh's relations with France and Russia are based on long traditional friendship and strong bonds of personal relations as well as the historical roles of these two powers in Cambodia. However, Cambodia's attempt to revitalise its relations with France and Russia is more a tactical move than a genuine strategic direction of the Kingdom due to Phnom Penh's conviction that Paris and Moscow are neither willing to nor capable of protecting Cambodia. Moreover, the two powers lack economic leverage in Cambodia.

Cambodia's former colonial master: France's symbolic role

Cambodia and France have a special relationship due to their shared history and French cultural and linguistic influence. As discussed in Chapter 3, the French had occupied an eminent place in Cambodia after their arrival in Indochina the nineteenth century. Ideationally, French had been a "language of culture, language of access to knowledge, language of modernity and language of aperture to the world."[57] The close bonds between Norodom Sihanouk and French leaders, particularly General Charles de Gaulle, had shaped Cambodia-France diplomatic relations. France's role in Cambodia continued to be consolidated during and after the 1991 Paris Peace Agreements as the co-chair of the peace negotiation process. Throughout the 1990s, France was the second largest donor to Cambodia, just after Japan.[58] France has played an important role in the preservation of Cambodia's cultural heritage. Since 1991, France has contributed around USD30 million to help restore the Angkor complexes, thus remaining the leading donor in the cultural field of Cambodia.[59] Nowadays, France is still recognised by many Cambodians as their principal bridge with Europe. Many Cambodians, including politicians both within the ruling CPP and the opposition party, have a second house in France and send their children to study in this western country.

Cambodia-France ties can be traced back to the imposition of the French protectorate in Cambodia in 1863, which lasted for 90 years. The arrival of the French helped Cambodia to fend off the territorial ambitions and domination of the Siamese on the west and the Vietnamese on the east. Recently, Cambodian leaders have again looked to France for support in safeguarding Cambodia's territorial integrity. As Cambodia and Thailand experienced tense relations due to the border conflict surrounding the Preah Vihear temple, Prime Minister Hun Sen visited France as one of the guests of honour at the parade of French National Day on 14 July 2009. It was an important move, at least symbolically, by Phnom Penh to convey a message that Cambodia's old master remained around. During the meetings with French leaders, Hun Sen indicated that "Cambodia has accepted to allow French oil company, TOTAL, to proceed to oil exploration in block III, one of Cambodia's potential oil and gas resources in the Gulf of Thailand, which was welcomed by France."[60] It was an attempt to engage France in the resource-rich areas, which are also claimed by Bangkok. Two years later, French Prime Minister Francois Fillion visited Cambodia in early July 2011. During the visit, Paris stated that "France is ready to help resolve the Cambodia-Thailand border dispute" by providing "maps and relevant documents to all parties."[61] Once again, as Phnom Penh and Hanoi were at odds over the border demarcation, Paris promised to send French "mapping exerts to help draw up a new map," which would contribute to a peaceful border demarcation between Cambodia and Vietnam.[62]

As a result, the last four years witnessed numerous high-level visits by Cambodian leaders to France. King Norodom Sihamoni paid his official visits in April 2014 and December 2015. Deputy Prime Minister and then Foreign Minister Hor Namhong visited France in July 2014, followed by the visit of Prime Minister Hun Sen in October 2015 and Foreign Minister Prak Sokhom in November

2016.[63] This illustrates Phnom Penh's efforts to promote Cambodia's relations with its former colonial master and to diversify its foreign relations. However, Cambodia-France relations lack economic substance. France, which had been the leading investor in Cambodia following the end of the Cambodian civil war in 1991, lost its place in the early 2000s. The direct investment from France to Cambodia in the period of 2007 to mid-2009 was only around USD43.4 million.[64] French assistance to Cambodia is also relatively small, compared to that of China and Japan. From 1993 to 2015, Paris had provided assistance of around EUR350 million to Cambodia.[65]

Russia's "Turn to the East": The return of Cambodia's former patron

In 2010, President Vladimir Putin declared Russia's "Turn to the East," with the objective of strengthening its economic, political and security engagement in Asia. There are a number of motives behind Mr. Putin's pivot to Asia.[66] First, Moscow is attempting to lessen its economic dependence on the West in the wake of the global financial and euro zone crises. Russia's pivot to Asia has been given further impetus due to falling oil prices and Western sanctions following Russia's annexation of Crimea in March 2014. Second, as the global economic centre of gravity has shifted to the Asia-Pacific, Russia sees the lure of Asia's growing economies, particularly China. In October 2014, President Putin said that "Asia is playing an ever greater role in the world, in the economy and in politics, and there is simply no way we can afford to overlook these developments."[67] Putin's interest in Asia was apparent since he came to power in 2000. Moscow's Asia policy had been Sino-centric as President Putin had a strong desire to work with Beijing to build a multi-polar world order. However, Moscow harbours some concerns, although the Sino-Russian relationship has been strengthened to an historic high. Those include worries over intellectual property theft from its sales of high-tech weapons to China, potential Chinese irredentist claims in the resource-rich but under-populated Russian Far East, and China's growing influence in Russia's backyard – Central Asia.

Ian Storey argues that Russian options in Asia are limited due to their strained relations with the West over "Ukraine and Moscow's decision to bolster its military presence in the disputed territories."[68] On top of that, as India has recently "loosened its defence ties with Russia in favour of arms imports from America and Europe," Kremlin has increasingly focused its attention on Southeast Asia.[69] Moreover, Professor Leszek Buszynski argues that Russia has recognised the importance of Asia-Pacific regionalism for its development as the prosperity of Siberia and the Russian Far East "required closer integration with Asian regional institutions."[70] Therefore, Moscow has, rhetorically at least, praised ASEAN as an important partner and supported ASEAN's centrality in the evolving regional architecture in the Asia-Pacific. ASEAN and Russia have three summit meetings – in Kuala Lumpur in 2005 and in Hanoi in 2010 and more noticeably in the Commemorative Summit to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the ASEAN-Russia

dialogue relations in Sochi, Russia, in May 2016 under the theme of "Moving Towards a Strategic Partnership for Mutual Benefit."[71] Russia has also participated more actively in almost all ASEAN-led regional frameworks, including the ARF, the ADMM-Plus and the EAS.

As Moscow has focused its attention towards Southeast Asia, it is clear that Cambodia-Russia relations have been on a positive note. In May 2016, Cambodia and Russia celebrated the sixtieth anniversary of their relationship. Cambodian Foreign Minister Prak Sokhonn remarked that "despite the profound and complex changes that have transformed the world over the past six decades, our ties have stood the test of time, ties that are based on long standing traditions of solid friendship, partnership, mutual trust and understanding."[72] The traditional friendship between the two countries dated back to the Soviet Union's support and assistance after the fall of the Khmer Rouge in January 1979. While the West isolated the Hanoi-installed regime of the PRK, Phnom Penh counted on "the humanitarian and economic support of the Soviet Union, and most importantly on the military-technical support to prevent the return of the genocide regime."[73] The Soviet Union and later Russia has played a crucial role in human resource development of Cambodia. More than 8,000 Cambodians, including Foreign Minister Prak Sokhonn, Economic and Finance Minister Aun Pornmoniroth and Education Minister Hang Chuon Naron, have studied in the former Soviet Union/Russia. Many others are also holding senior positions in the Royal Government of Cambodia. Those Soviet/Russia educated intelligentsia have played important role to shaping Cambodia's relations with Russia.

Diplomatically, frequent exchanges of high-level visits took place during the last two years. The years of 2015 and 2016 witnessed numerous noticeable official visits by Cambodian leaders to Russia.[74] Deputy Prime Minister Hor Namhong visited Russia in March 2016, followed by Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of National Defence Tea Banh in April 2016, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sar Kheng in May 2016, and Minister of Environment Say Samal in October 2016. Heng Samrin, the president of the National Assembly, visited Moscow in April 2016. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Council of Ministers Sok An visited Russia twice in the course of two years, in May 2015 and June 2016. Cambodian Foreign Minister Prak Sokhonn paid a working visit in October 2016. More noticeably, Prime Minister Hun Sen visited Russia in May 2016. During Prime Minister Hun Sen's visit, Phnom Penh and Moscow signed nine agreements related to cooperation in many areas, including justice, communication and information technology, investment, trade, sports, and, more importantly, nuclear energy.[75] The years of 2015 and 2016 also saw a number of visits by Russian leaders to Cambodia, including three visits of Minister of Telecom and Mass Communications Nikolay Nikiforov – the co-chair of the Cambodia-Russia Inter-governmental Commission for Trade, Economic, Scientific and Technical Cooperation – in July 2015, in March 2016, and November 2016 and the visit of the First Deputy Chairman of the Council of the Federation of the Federal Assembly of Russia in March 2016. More importantly, Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev paid a historic visit to Cambodia, for he was the first head of government of Russia to visit the Kingdom. It underscored the importance of Cambodia to Putin's "Turn to the East" policy.

At the regional level, Cambodia and Russia have extended mutual support and cooperation in many forums, especially in ASEAN. Cambodia has been a strong supporter of Russia's engagement in Southeast Asia, including the EAS and ADMM-Plus. Given Russia's keen interest in Southeast Asia, Cambodia stand to benefit from Moscow's "Turn to the East" policy. However, pundits in Southeast Asia share the view that Russia's influence in the region remains modest. Economically, Russia is a minor player in Southeast Asia. Aside from natural resources, energy technology and arms sales, there seems little scope for expansion in Russia-Southeast Asia trade. Militarily, Moscow's engagement with Southeast Asia is also limited. The most prominent aspect of Russia's defence engagement with Southeast Asia remains arms sales to countries in the region, especially Vietnam. Moscow has not been a proactive participant in ASEAN-led forums due to its limited influence and its more substantive interests in other inter-state forums. Amid scepticism among ASEAN members about Russia's engagement with the region, Cambodia can play a proactive role in effectively bringing this major power into ASEAN's cooperation mechanisms. This will benefit not only ASEAN in its attempt to promote a central role in Asia-Pacific multilateralism but also Cambodia's endeavour to diversify its foreign relations with major powers.

However, there are at least three main challenges in Cambodia's strategic reconfiguration towards Russia. First, although Cambodia-Russia bilateral trade has increased over the last decade, the two-way trade remains modest with the total volume was more than USD55 million in 2016.[76] Second, Soviet-era debt of USD1.5 billion that Cambodia owes remains a sticking point in bilateral meetings between Phnom Penh and Moscow. The Cambodian government has repeatedly asked Moscow to write partially off the debt, to cover part of the debt with the supply of Cambodian products and to convert another part into a mechanism that provides preferential treatment for Russian companies in Cambodia. However, no breakthrough on the debt issue has been made. A senior official at the Cambodian Ministry of Economics and Finance said that "what the Russians really wants from Cambodia is the debt," and that Moscow has tried to use the debt issue to press Phnom Penh to give Russian companies a special treatment in Cambodia's telecom industry.[77] Third, Phnom Penh is well aware that Cambodia is far from occupying an important place in Russia's foreign policy towards Southeast Asia. The 2016 Russian Foreign Policy Concept highlights Moscow's efforts to realise a "strategic partnership" with ASEAN and to strengthen its "comprehensive strategic partnership" with Vietnam as well as to expand "multi-dimensional cooperation" with Indonesia, Thailand, Singapore, and Malaysia.[78] Unfortunately, Cambodia was left out from the foreign policy white paper. On top of that, Russia's close ties with Vietnam are a source of friction between Phnom Penh and Moscow. Russia-Vietnam alliance constrains Phnom Penh's alignment with Moscow.

Conclusion

Western diplomats in Phnom Penh claimed that the West has already lost Cambodia to China. It is also argued that Phnom Penh has become increasingly

over-dependent on Beijing and has no interest in diversifying Cambodia's foreign relations with other major powers. The fact of the matter is that Phnom Penh has tried to embark upon Cambodia's foreign policy diversification towards Japan, France and Russia. However, Cambodia has very little strategic flexibility, as its alignment options are limited. Beside China, Cambodia has placed its bet on Japan through the establishment of Cambodia-Japan strategic partnership in 2013. Cambodian leaders do not see the US, France, and Russia in a similar lens, due to their lack of confidence in the three powers.

Phnom Penh's strategic configuration is a challenging task because its alignments with China and Japan have different values. This challenge will be more pronounced if the relations between these two powers deteriorate. Another challenge in Cambodia's alignment politics is the fact that having strategic partnerships with many major powers at the same time does always not guarantee their unwavering commitment to expand their support for Cambodia. Therefore, Phnom Penh needs to prioritise its strategic alignments based on the convergence of strategic interest between Cambodia and major powers in question as well as Phnom Penh's confidence in the major powers' commitment to Cambodia's security.

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7 China and the legitimacy of the Cambodian ruling party

Realist and neorealist schools of thought argue that in the international arena, all states share the same interests – that is, increasing their relative power vis-à-vis other states – and, therefore, behave alike in dealing with the same external challenges, irrespective of their domestic regime types. However, scholars such as Jack Levy have made a strong case for considering domestic political factors when explaining the causes of war, while other scholars have demonstrated that foreign policy preferences are strongly influenced by domestic politics.[1] Presumably, leaders' desire for survival motivates their selection of policies and political institutions not only in the domestic realm but also in the defining and pursuit of foreign policy objectives. Thus, it is argued that "all actions taken by political leaders are intended by them to be compatible with their desire to retain power."[2] In other words, foreign policy choices are the effective outcome of a government's interest in domestic political survival.

As discussed in the earlier chapters, domestic political dynamics had always played an important role in shaping Cambodia's foreign policy. The history of Cambodia in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was a repetition of the situation where Cambodia's acceptance of Thai or Vietnamese suzerainty was usually preceded by ruinous civil wars between Cambodian aspirants to the throne. Likewise, Sihanouk's foreign policy of neutrality and non-alignment was, to some extent, the product of domestic political competition between the leftists and rightists who got support and assistance from foreign powers. As a result, Sihanouk had to accommodate the two political forces in order to prevent Cambodia from being pulled apart and eventually falling under the domination of foreign powers. This chapter, therefore, attempts to highlight how Cambodia's domestic political dynamics shape the country's foreign policy towards China. To be precise, it tries to examine to what extent Phnom Penh's search for regime survival drives Cambodia's relations with China.

The author of this book argues that China's 'no-strings attached' assistance and economic engagement provides a conducive environment for the promotion of legitimacy of the CPP for three main reasons. First, China's foreign aid and investment simulate economic growth and job creation, which are crucial to promote the performance-based legitimacy of the ruling elite in Cambodia. Second, China's 'no-strings attached' assistance and unconditional investment practice

benefits the ruling elite as the political and economic systems in Cambodia are closely intertwined in a form of neo-patrimonialism. Third, due to China's rapidly growing political and economic clout, Beijing is not only a source of inspiration but also a shield that leaders in Phnom Penh can use to cushion pressures and criticisms from the West.

The China model: inspiration for Phnom Penh

As discussed in Chapter 5, after three decades of economic reform, China has emerged as one of the key players in the international system. China's ascendance has stirred debates among scholars about its implications for the international political economy. As the rise of China has nothing to do with democracy, Beijing provides an alternative model to the neo-liberal pattern of development in the West, which has been known as the 'Washington Consensus.' The Washington Consensus focuses on the importance of macro-economic stability and the free-market capitalism and political liberalisation.[3] However, due to the failure of neo-liberal economic response to economic crises in the 1980s and 1990s, and the recent global economic crisis, dissatisfaction with the Washington Consensus has grown.[4] Meanwhile, China has achieved impressive economic development over the last three decades, with an average economic growth rate of 10 per cent, and lifted over 500 million people out of poverty.[5] China's successful economic development has inspired many developing countries across the globe. As a result, it is argued that "the developing countries are not an exception and, in fact, many in Asia, Africa and Latin America may see the People's Republic of China as an example to follow."[6]

The Beijing Consensus or China Model has been a hot topic within academia, media circles and the policy community. There are two main components of the China Model: economic liberalisation and firm political control.[7] The first component is the implementation of liberal economic policy by opening up much of the economy, allowing labour flexibility, keeping the tax and regulatory framework low, and building supporting infrastructure through a combination of private sector and state spending. The second component is to ensure the ruling party's firm grip on government, the court system, the army, the internal security apparatus, and the flow of information. Empirically, the rise of China has been appealing to many governments across the globe. China has proved that economic growth does not necessarily result in democratic reform. Therefore, China is an example of a political regime with a technocratic approach to governance, which incorporates interventionist economic policies and places strong emphasis not only on the achievement of economic growth but also on the maintenance of social stability.[8] Arguably, the model is an alternative for authoritarian leaders who may want to improve the growth and development rates of their countries without putting their regimes at risk and hence make economic development a priority over political reform.[9] Moreover, the leaders of autocratic regimes around the world can be certain that China does not conduct its foreign policy based on democratic standards nor criticise domestic affairs of other states due to Beijing's non-interference

approach. Eric Anderson provides a concise six-point summary of the China Model, namely (1) a pragmatic approach to reform; (2) active state intervention in the economy; (3) the pursuit of economic reform before democratisation; (4) the rejection of the Western claim on the universality of human rights; (5) the promotion of authoritarian capitalism as an alternative to liberal democracy; and (6) a foreign policy focused on sovereignty, self-determination and mutual respect.[10]

In Cambodia, the ruling CPP has looked up to Beijing for governance guidance not only on economic development but also on political legitimacy and control. CPP leaders, including Prime Minister Hun Sen, are the fans of Xi Jinping's leadership style. In April 2017, the Prime Minister launched the Khmer-language version of a book, titled "Xi Jinping: The Governance of China." During the book launch, he said that "Xi's leadership style could teach the Cambodians about 'good governance'."[11] The book has been displayed in the offices of some of Cambodian senior leaders.[12] Furthermore, it is argued that the CPP has adopted an ideology similar to the China Model based on the developmental state.[13] Peace, political order and particularly economic growth are the precondition of liberal democracy and have therefore been at the core of the CPP's political platform. The ruling party claims that it is the only guardian of peace and prosperity in Cambodia. Recently, Prime Minister Hun Sen occasionally warned of civil war if the Cambodian population would not support his ruling party. For instance, on his Facebook page posted on 31 May 2017, Hun Sen wrote:

> Millions of Cambodian children have prospered under the leadership of the CPP . . . but why some want to entertain the idea of putting a different government in power. . . . Does anyone want to try a taste of war and family separation anymore?[14]

Similarly, the Cambodian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation issued a statement on 11 April 2017, in which it stressed that "Democracy doesn't equate to denial of the legitimacy of constitutional institutions, indiscriminate defamation of political leaders, incitement to racial hate, violation of the law, constant instigation of political tension and stirring up a climate of civil war."[15] Moreover, the CPP has recently been accused of promoting the rule by law, as in China, to ensure political stability and its dominance in Cambodian political landscape. A Cambodian doctoral scholar Chhoeun Kongkea observes that "the Cambodian government has used a mixture of legal, judicial and repressive tools to counter threats to its power."[16] In the aftermath of the 2013 election, the Cambodian government enacted a number of controversial laws in order to promote what it calls the rule of law in Cambodia. The Cambodian government defends those laws by arguing that they are all about the promotion of the rule of law in Cambodia and that "Democracy without the rule of law would be tantamount to anarchy and no one wants that."[17]

However, for critics and human rights activists, the CPP has used those laws against its political opponents and independent voices. This process began with the passage of the Law on Association and NGOs (LANGO) in July 2015. The

law has been considered as the government's "tool to silence critical voices and political opponents" and to restrict the working space of the hundreds of organisations working in Cambodia as "the authorities could potentially refuse registration or re-registrations, with adverse implications for the organization concerned."[18] In a similar move, the government adopted the law on trade unions in April 2016, which allegedly precludes individuals convicted of a crime from leading trade unions. According to Human Rights Watch, many independent trade unions are led by persons convicted of, or currently under threat of, charges related to their work in defence of workers' rights.[19] More controversially, the Cambodian parliament passed the Amendments to Law on Political Parties in February 2017, which allowed the government to dissolve or ban any political party whose leaders have committed crimes.[20] The passage of this law paved the way for Phnom Penh to ban Sam Rainsy, the former president of the Cambodian National Rescue Party (CNRP), to arrest the party's President Kem Sokha and to eventually dissolve the party on 16 November 2017. In defending the amendment law, the Cambodian government argues:

> The Law on Political Party that was enacted in 1997 has never been amended for 20 years while the Constitution and the Internal Regulations of the National Assembly have undergone several amendments. . . . Thus, the imperative to revise this law is to reflect the legal evolution related to elections . . . and to prevent distortion of democratic principles in the name of democracy.

In September 2016, Cambodia's Ministry of Justice announced that China would help reform Cambodia's judicial system. Such an announcement provokes controversy. Some commentators argue that reform is needed, but "China cannot be the best role model for fixing Cambodia's broken judiciary" due to the fact that the ruling Communist Party totally controls the Chinese court system.[21] In April 2017, Cambodia and China also signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on information cooperation between their state information agencies.[22] Cambodian journalists, allegedly from state news services or the CPP-aligned media, have been given scholarships to study in China. Critics argue that the official exchanges might facilitate Cambodia's growing efforts to stifle news outlets thanks to China's sophisticated system of media censorship and control. For instance, Sophal Ear argues that "neither Cambodia nor China are known to have very strong independent media. . . . Neither Phnom Penh nor Beijing seem interested in nurturing anything more than mouthpieces for their version of the truth."[23]

Beijing has also been helping Cambodia organise elections. David Hutt argues that "Hun Sen, after years of hectoring from the EU and US on how to promote democracy and rights, is now looking instead to Beijing's authoritarian model for advice on how to develop national institutions."[24] Prior to the commune election in June 2017, China provided USD11.7 million for Cambodia's National Election Committee (NEC). The EU and Japan have given respectively USD6.7 million and USD1.1 million to help NEC to organise the polls. Recently, China has increasingly donated funds for the organising of elections in Cambodia. For the

first time, China provided more funds than any other donor countries for electoral processes in Cambodia in 2018.

China and performance-based legitimacy of the ruling party

Since the start of the new millennium, China has increasingly extended its influence in all parts of the world. As the West struggled to completely overcome the Great Recession, China has bolstered its profile as a major foreign investor, alternative donor, and key trading partner. However, the rise of China has created much suspicion and criticism among Western countries due to China's way of doing business and providing development assistance "without strings attached or without political conditionality."[25] Interestingly, as for Phnom Penh, China's approach is very appealing as economic resources and performance are the key sources of Cambodia's current regime legitimacy. China's proclaimed foreign policy of accommodation and non-interference into domestic affairs of other states and the resurgent role of the Cambodia-Chinese communities in Cambodia's economic development provide the current regime with a significant latitude vis-à-vis its traditional Western partners. Without demanding political and economic reforms in Cambodia, China's investment and aid appears to be a convenient alternative for the Cambodian government over Western economic engagement.[26] For example, a lack of transparency and accountability associated with infrastructure projects and investment deals makes it easier for Cambodian leaders and well-connected Cambodian tycoons to conduct business with the Chinese government and Chinese companies.[27] This has allowed the Cambodian ruling elite to consolidate both political influence and economic power. It is reported that those who have supported Hun Sen have been rewarded with access to the country's resources, including land, forests, fisheries, mining concessions, air routes, and public constructions.[28] The main beneficiaries have been a handful of Cambodian and Sino-Khmer tycoons who emerged from humble beginnings and rose in parallel with Hun Sen. Cambodia's economy is controlled by a "quasi-palace elite" which consists of a network of CPP politician, military brass and well-connected tycoons.[29] Decisions related to foreign investment in Cambodia are also made by a relatively small number of top officials and business tycoons connected closely to the political elite through blood, marriage, and shared business interests.[30] To be fair, however, above-mentioned practices are not uncommon in Asia. In fact, Chinese companies have been competitive in many parts of the world thanks to their comprehension of and ability to use and manipulate those practices.

Many of the business tycoons are ethnic Chinese who have built trust with their Chinese counterparts thanks to their cultural and linguistic affinity. According to Heder, foreign investment tends to be channelled through a group of what he calls "economic mandarins," most of whom are ethnic Chinese, such as Ly Yong Phat and Lao Meng Khin.[31] Hun Sen's nephew, Hun To, has recently seen as one of the most influential "economic mandarins."[32] Profits flow through their private companies to the military and police forces, who are paid to secure and protect or sometimes

obtain land and other facilities. Then civilian officials are offered parts of the profits through "bribes and kick-backs."[33] Some of those funds are recycled through patronage networks to bolster the CPP's position, especially in advance of commune and national elections, in a form of gift-giving to rural communities in exchange for electoral support. The donations include money, food, clothing, and utensils. The ruling CPP also demands funds and contributions from the party's members, CPP-aligned tycoons and private companies to build roads, bridges, schools and health clinics. The Cambodian government have always rejected the above-mentioned claims and argued that they are just groundless, smear allegations to discredit the ruling CPP. Some senior officials, to some extent, acknowledge the existence of what can be called 'neo-patrimonialism' or 'patron-client' system in Cambodia and the increasingly important role of China in maintaining the survival of this system. However, they argue that China's increasing political and economic presence in Cambodia is less dangerous to the Kingdom's security and national identity compared to Vietnam's political domination from 1979 to the early 1990s and Thailand's "cultural and economic neo-colonization" prior to the 2003 anti-Thai riots.[34]

Moreover, as China has become Cambodia's largest foreign investor and economic benefactor, Beijing's increasing 'no-strings attached' assistance can be used to promote the CPP's image as the state and the ruling party are almost identical in the eyes of the majority of Cambodian voters. China's economic engagement has been supportive for the CPP's dominant role as it prioritises economic growth and infrastructure development over democratic values. The ruling party has adopted the ideology of developmental state, with primary emphases on peace, social order, stability and particularly economic growth, but not liberal democracy. Economically, after three decades of gradual economic reforms and international integration, Cambodia became a lower middle-income country in 2015. The Cambodian economy enjoyed rapid growth with an average growth rate of 7.6 per cent per annum form 1993 to 2003 and reached the highest growth of over 10 per cent per annum in between 2004 and 2007.[35] The growth rate continued to be high at around 7 per cent for 2017 and 2018. The poverty rate dropped from 53.2 per cent in 2004 to 11.5 per cent in 2015; and per capita income increased from USD417 to USD1, 215 during the same period.[36] Particularly, Cambodia has succeeded in achieving the Cambodian Millennium Development Goals. It was chosen by the UN to be an example country for achieving development goals.[37] The government has also increased public servant's official pay dramatically since 2013. In August 2017, Hun Sen also promised a slew of new benefits for garment workers, including a big increase in their monthly minimum wage – from USD153 to at least USD168 plus pensions.

Behind Cambodia's economic achievements under the CPP's rule, China's role cannot be denied. As discussed in Chapter 3, after the transformation of Cambodia-China relations in 1997, China became an important political and economic partner of Cambodia. China's foreign assistance has been very crucial for an aid-dependent country, like Cambodia. As of 2014, China has funnelled cumulative investments of USD10 billion and development assistance, including grant aid and concessional loans, of USD3 billion to Cambodia.[38] Chinese aid to Cambodia has been steadily increasing in recent years. In November 2014, Chinese

President Xi Jinping pledged that China would provide Cambodia an annual development assistance package worth between USD500 million to USD700 million annually – a significant increase from less than USD100 million in 2007.[39] Cambodian leaders, particularly Prime Minister Hun Sen, frequently praised China's assistance for having 'no strings attached.' They enthused that "Cambodia's development could not be detached from Chinese aid" and that "without Chinese aid, Cambodia goes nowhere."[40] Sophal Ear asserts that, during the course of 2002 and 2010, "for each dollar the Cambodian government spent, it received – on average – more than 94 cents on the dollar in net foreign aid."[41] During his meeting with Prime Minister Hun Sen on the sidelines of the 11th Asia-Europe Meeting in Mongolia in July 2016, Chinese Premier Li Kegiang pledged about USD600 million for a period of three years from 2016 to 2018.[42] As a result, China's development assistance to Cambodia accounted for nearly 36 per cent of USD732 million foreign bilateral aid that the Kingdom received – almost four times as much as the US's assistance.[43] Just during a short span of 2013 and 2015, China provided around UDS324.5 million to Cambodia, including the building of the iconic Morodok Techo National Stadium worth of USD157million.[44] The new stadium will be an important legacy of Prime Minister Hun Sen and the pride of the CPP. Other iconic state buildings, including the National Assembly and the Council of Ministers, were funded by Chinese loans and assistance. Beijing has also provided an increasing amount of interest-free loans and concessional loans to Phnom Penh. According the data of the Cambodian Foreign Ministry, China offered more than USD1.2 billion in loans to Cambodia to promote the physical infrastructure of the country during the course of 2013 to 2016.[45] During the same period, Beijing and its provincial authorities also provided material assistance, including vehicles, machineries, office equipment, and donations for disaster relief to Cambodia amounting to approximately UDS30 million.[46]

Although China is not a significantly big market for Cambodia, the bilateral trade between the two countries increased significantly from USD3.28 billion in 2013 to USD4.32 billion in 2015.[47] More noticeably, Cambodia's exports to China increased by USD550 million during this period, with the total export volume of USD830 million in 2016.[48] Both sides have agreed to increase the bilateral trade to the volume of USD6 billion in 2020.[49] Cambodia's primary exports to China include rice, rubber, cassava, sugar, pepper and cashew nuts. It is worth noticing that while Cambodia has suffered from increasing rice sector competition, mainly from Thailand and Vietnam, China pledged to buy 300,000 tons of Cambodian rice annually and promised to provide a USD300 million loan to help Cambodia on this sector.[50] In terms of FDI, Chinese companies funnelled nearly USD5billion in loans and investment to Cambodia between 2011 and 2015, which accounted for about 70 per cent of the total industrial investment in the country.[51] According to a report of the National Bank of Cambodia, FDI inflow into Cambodia increased 25 per cent in 2016 with the total investment of USD2.15 billion.[52] The report shows that China was Cambodia's largest foreign investor with the total investment of USD748 million, followed by Vietnam with USD192 million, and Japan with USD185 million. In 2015 alone, the Cambodian Foreign

Investment Committee approved Chinese investment in 86 new projects, in addition to 17 existing investment projects which amount to USD779.214 million, and further increased to approximately USD985.8 million with 62 new projects in 2016.[53] Chinese investment projects have primarily focused on textile and garment industry, hydro-electricity, rice-milling factories, agro-industry, fertiliser, construction, mines and energy.[54]

China's economic engagement also helps Cambodia address deficits in infrastructure like access to electricity and rural transport, which all raise the cost of production. In this respect, Cambodian senior government officials stated that China is the only partner that has had the "wherewithal and resources" to invest in the "USD1 to 2 billion-type of projects" that can help Cambodia develop the energy and infrastructure sectors.[55] In contrast, other foreign investors, including Japan, the US, South Korea, and the EU, are very much private-sector driven and focus on the commercial sectors. In the hydro-electricity sector, China has been the biggest source of investment, with more than USD2.37 billion in seven projects that would produce 1,328 Megawatts.[56] Six hydro-electricity dams have been completed and thus allowed Cambodia to be self-reliant in the rainy season.[57] Prior to the construction of the dams, Cambodia was mainly dependent on electricity supply from its neighbouring countries, particularly Vietnam and Laos. It was reported that the Cambodian leaders were concerned that the neighbouring countries might use the electricity supply as a political tool to pressure Phnom Penh to take into consideration of their interests.[58] For Phnom Penh, therefore, China's assistance and support to accelerate the development of hydro-electricity sector in Cambodia not only addresses the energy need for rapid economic development but also serves the Kingdom's strategic interest and national security.

China has also played a leading role in Cambodia's physical infrastructure development. China's assistance has helped Cambodia to complete the construction of 1,500 km roads as well as seven important bridges.[59] Chinese firms have established Sihanoukville Special Economic Zone with an area of more than 11 million square metre, in which 117 companies have invested around USD331 million in the SEZ and have created about 13,500 jobs.[60] Chinese firms are now constructing the second SEZ – Kampot Special Economic Zone – with a total investment of USD100 million.[61] Moreover, China has been a significant market for Cambodia's tourism industry. The industry is one of the drivers of Cambodia's economic growth, which brought in more than 5 million international visitors and generated USD3 billion in revenue in 2016.[62] It is projected that the industry would attract around 7 million foreign tourist visitors by 2020, which would earn the country about USD5.5 billion and create approximately 800,000 jobs.[63] Among the tourist arrivals, Chinese travellers accounted for 16.6 per cent, which ranked second after Vietnamese visitors.[64] By the first quarter of 2017, China bypassed Vietnam as the largest source of foreign tourist arrivals in Cambodia with around 360,000 Chinese visitors.[65] The number of Chinese tourists in Cambodia is expected to increase to 2 million people by 2020.[66] The surge of Chinese visitors has been facilitated by frequent direct-fights between Cambodia and China. Currently, 12 Chinese companies are operating over 100 direct flights to Cambodia per week.[67]

Although Cambodia's economy has enjoyed high economic growth rates over the last two decades, sources of the growth are narrow and rely mainly on agriculture, tourism, and the textile industry. To stay competitive and sustain high economic performance, Cambodia needs to move towards a skill-based and innovation-driven economy. Industrial development, economic diversification, and enhancement of competitiveness and productivity are necessary for Cambodia to move up in the regional and global value chain, which in turn attracts FDI and stimulates private sector development and job creation.[68] Other constraints to the economic development are deficits in infrastructure provision, which raises the cost of production and significantly limits access to electricity, rural road transport, and water sanitation. In addition, according to an ADB report, the workforce remains insufficiently trained and skilled and has limited access to education, healthcare, and nutrition which hampers progress in improving the quality of human capital.[69] The report also identifies that weaknesses in governance, such as corruption and weak public sector management, and limited fiscal space, whereby the government has insufficient funds to invest in the main growth-supporting factors and in social services, are also key challenges to sustainable growth of the Cambodian economy. Meanwhile, Cambodia's logistics are less developed compared with other ASEAN member countries due to a lack of reliable network of transportation, telecommunications, warehousing, trucking services, and other related infrastructure. Based on the assessment by the World Bank in its annual Logistics Performance Index (LPI), Cambodia ranked 73rd with a score of 2.8 (5 being the perfect score).[70] This suggests that Cambodia's infrastructure, logistics competence, and customs have the lowest performance. Moreover, despite Cambodia's recent efforts to develop hydro-electricity, electricity costs in the Kingdom are high compared with its neighbouring countries (Thailand and Vietnam), making production less cost-effective. Therefore, it is obvious that Cambodia would need a huge investment in both physical and soft infrastructures in order to maintain its economic growth and enhance its economic competitiveness.[71]

To address those challenges, the Cambodian government has looked towards China for assistance, with the conviction that Cambodia stands to benefit from China's regional initiatives, such as BRI and the Mekong-Lancang Cooperation (MLC). The Cambodian leaders perceive that BRI will enhance Cambodia's infrastructure construction and economic development while enhancing the country's capacity to play a more relevant role in regional integration.[72] Cambodian Minister of Transport, Sun Chanthol once said, "Without infrastructure, you cannot revive. We have been blamed for always going to China, but it is because we need infrastructure fast and quick, nothing more than that."[73] According to Chheang Vannarith, the lack of capital is a main obstacle for countries in the development of infrastructure, so China's initiatives for AIIB and the SRF are very useful.[74] Cambodia needs about USD700 million per year to develop infrastructure such as roads, bridges, power grid, and irrigation system to maintain high economic growth. In this respect, the Cambodian government is convinced that Chinese projects are usually implemented fast, which are responsive to the needs of Cambodia's development.[75] Several infrastructure investment projects

have been executed under the BRI scheme, such as the construction of an SEZ in Sihanoukville and hydropower plants in Koh Kong province and Stung Treng province. Other projects that are going to be implemented include a new Siem Reap International Airport and a USD2 billion project to build the Phnom Penh-Sihanoukville expressway.[76] Prime Minister Hun Sen has made frequent remarks relating to BRI, believing that it would

> benefit Cambodia's social and economic development . . . help boost the development of Cambodia and the region . . . facilitate the connectivity among the developing countries and contribute to the economic recovery and sustainable development of the region . . . facilitate regional integration as well as maintain stability and improving people's wellbeing in the region.[77]

Sok Siphana, an advisor to the Cambodian Government and the Chairman of the Cambodia Development Resource Institute (CDRI), said BRI would promote peace and development as it brings "enormous benefits to Cambodia, particularly regarding funds for the development of infrastructure such as railways, roads, ports, power grids and air transportation."[78] He also believes that Cambodia will attract more investments from China and expand its export markets. Phnom Penh considers BRI as the main force for the massive influx of Chinese investment in Cambodia, including major infrastructural projects such as energy infrastructure.[79] Moreover, it is believed that Cambodia stands to benefit enormously from a newly established regional cooperation framework, the MLC, that Chinese Premier Li Keqiang proposed at the ASEAN-China Summit on 13 November 2014.[80] MLC is a framework to implement BRI in the Mekong region, with primary objectives of advancing "all-round cooperation" and creating a "Community of Shared Future of Peace and Prosperity."[81] Politically, Cambodian officials seem to be overjoyed with Cambodia's important role in this sub-regional cooperation mechanism.[82] As the co-chair of the MLC meeting from 2016 to 2018, Cambodia has hosted a number of meetings, especially the MLC Leaders' Meeting in January 2018. More importantly, the Cambodia's People Party (CPP) is a coordinator of Mekong-China political parties cooperation, which is the clear illustration that Chinese leaders have entrusted Phnom Penh. Economically, Cambodia has benefited from China's assistance to speed up connectivity development and cooperation in production capacity under the MLC framework. Foreign Minister Prak Sokhon said "Cambodia treats MLC as a natural extension of the Belt and Road Initiative, and is willing to make use of the MLC platform to further reinforce strategic integration and cooperation within the Belt and Road framework with China."[83] According to the Cambodian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China would provide a 10 billion yuan concessional loan and a USD10 billion credit line to improve connectivity and promote production capacity in the region.[84] Beijing will also contribute USD300 million to the MLC Social Fund in the upcoming five years to support small- and medium-sized projects. As of February 2017, Cambodia has submitted 44 projects for funding from the MLC Social Fund. China will also provide Cambodia 18,000 government scholarships and 5,000 training opportunities every year in the next three years.[85]

The Cambodian government also believes that China will play an important role in helping Cambodia to implement its National Industrial Development Plan (NIDP) 2015–2025. Since 1993, the industrial sector has played an important role in the Cambodian economy. Jobs in the industrial sector accounted for approximately 1.4 million, which was equivalent to 18.6 per cent of the country's labour market. However, the Cambodian industry remains weak. Its key characteristics are narrow industrial base, weak and urban-centred entrepreneurship, low value addition, and low level of technology application. The NIDP envisages a transformation and modernisation of Cambodia's industrial structure from a labour-intensive industry to a skills-based industry by 2025.[86] To this end, one of the key strategies is to attract FDI for industrial development, export market expansion, and promotion of technology development and transfer.[87] In this respect, Prime Minister Hun Sen stated that the NIDP and China's BRI present "good complement to promote infrastructure connectivity, trade, industrial development."[88] To sum up, the Cambodian leaders see China as their best bet in maintaining high economic growth and in realising the country's vision to be a middle-income economy by 2030 and a high-income economy by 2050, which are important for the CPP to maintain and promote its legitimacy. A senior CPP leader noted:

> Cambodia welcomes all foreign investors, including the Americans and the Europeans . . . but if they cannot and are unwilling to help Cambodia promote economic development and alleviate poverty, they shall not to criticise Cambodia for welcoming Chinese investment.[89]

Hun Sen's concern over Western interference

Since 1993, the West has always criticised Phnom Penh for failing to uphold democratic principles. To the CPP leaders, this criticism is merely interference into the domestic affairs of Cambodia. Tharoor and Daws argue that it is hardly surprising that leaders of countries that have won their independence are always cautious of foreign interventions into their domestic affairs.[90] Cambodian leaders, especially Prime Minister Hun Sen, are strongly convinced that "all the talk of democracy they saw as a moral cover for the interests of foreign powers that had openly or clandestinely supported the Khmer Rouge throughout the 1980s."[91] In contrast, whenever donor countries put pressure on Hun Sen to improve governance and exercise political reforms, China steps in to relieve the pressure with enormous loans and investment. In most of their meetings with Cambodian leaders, Chinese leaders have always highlighted the fundamental principles of China's foreign policy, particularly Beijing's respect for sovereignty, non-interference into domestic affairs of other states, and win-win cooperation.[92] Those are appealing norms that Phnom Penh has advocated. More importantly, as China is a permanent member of the UNSC, Phnom Penh might be convinced that Beijing's support is crucial for the prevention of foreign intervention, especially under the façade of humanitarian intervention. Recently, MP Suos Yara, Vice-Chairman of CPP's Committee on External Relations, noticed:

> Although China is much bigger and stronger than Cambodia, in terms of size and power, both countries treat each other equally and with mutual respect. Equal sovereignty and non-interference are the key principles of international relations and the foundations of international peace and stability. . . . The Cambodia-China relationship can be a role model in modern international relations. It is about a special and equal relationship between a big country and a small country.[93]

Phnom Penh's perception of humanitarian intervention

The concept of humanitarian intervention drew global attention in the aftermath of the international community's failure to prevent the Rwanda genocide in 1994 in what UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan described as a "sin of omission."[94] British Prime Minister Tony Blair promised that "if Rwanda happens again we would not walk away as the outside world has done many times before" and that international society had a "moral duty" to provide military and humanitarian assistance to Africa whenever it was needed.[95] Humanitarian intervention was later reframed into the "responsibility to protect" or "R2P"as the latter is clearly less threatening to the notion of sovereignty. At the 2005 high-level UN World Summit meeting, the principle of R2P was adopted by UN members, including Cambodia and China.[96] There has been a movement among human rights activists, promoting the idea that liberal states have a moral right to intervene without the authorisation from the UNSC. NATO's intervention in Kosovo in 1999 was a watershed in this regard. A commission of experts found the intervention to be "illegal but legitimate" because although it did not satisfy international legal rules, mainly the UN Charter, it was "sanctioned by its compelling moral purpose."[97] Worse still, the use of humanitarian justifications to defend the invasion of Iraq intensified developing countries' suspicion of the emerging norms. Even the countries that were initially supportive of humanitarian intervention became less so due to a perceived abuse of humanitarian intervention by the US, the UK, and Australia to justify their military campaign in Iraq.[98] This has echoed the argument of the critics of humanitarian intervention that the norm is nothing more than 'Western imperialism' – an instrument to be used to enhance the influence of Western powers by putting their legal norms on other countries. The president of Algeria once said that "developing countries still largely see themselves not as norm setters in international affairs, but rather as norm takers, not as subjects of international, but as the not-always-willing recipients of it."[99] Chomsky argues that the emerging norm of humanitarian intervention and the responsibility to protect has "become salient features and useful instruments for the Western discourse on policies for the purpose of creating a new justification to gain power in developing countries."[100] In fact, only the big states, which are mainly Western states, have the resources for military interventions under R2P.

Traditionally, Beijing has insisted on a rigid conception of state sovereignty, which has manifested itself both in sensitivity towards external interference in China's domestic affairs and in an historical reluctance to engage in international

political and humanitarian crises. Chinese foreign policy rhetoric since the 1950s has emphasised the twin principles of non-intervention in the domestic affairs of other states and non-use of military force.[101] As far as R2P is concerned, despite endorsing the norm, China remained cautious to "preserve the vestiges of its once firm stance on non-interference – the requirement for host state consent for collective military deployment – without appearing to completely turn a blind eye to mass atrocities."[102] Among three pillars of the responsibility to respect,[103] China has endorsed the first two pillars and insisted on a strict interpretation of the third one – the authorisation of the use of force – which falls solely on the UNSC to make decision.[104] Phnom Penh has shared similar positions on R2P due to a concern that the norm can be used by Western powers to meddle into domestic affairs of small states like Cambodia.[105]

No one is more critical of Western intervention than Prime Minister Hun Sen due to a number of reasons. First, as history suggests, Cambodia's sovereignty had always been threatened by foreign powers' interference. Noticeably after retaining its independence from France in 1953, Cambodia's security problems arose as a result of interventions by outside powers, as discussed in earlier chapters. On many occasions, Hun Sen said that the fire of civil war in Cambodia was ignited by the US interference in the Kingdom by supporting and facilitating the coup against Prince Sihanouk in 1970. For instance, in September 2017, Hun Sen publicly stated that the US "instructed Lon Nol to stage a coup to overthrow King Father Norodom Sihanouk in March 2017, when the King was away in China."[106] Similarly, in a press release titled "Cambodia, Democracy and Human Rights: To tell the truth," the Cambodian Ministry of Foreign Affairs blamed the US for civil war in Cambodia during the 1970s throughout to the early 1990s. The press release stated that

> in the 1970s, after a regime change orchestrated by Washington, Cambodia was drawn into a war concealed under the façade of Western democracy and liberalism. The country was bombed into oblivion resulting subsequently in its collapse into the hands of the genocide regime that killed nearly two million people. . . . A hypocritical fact worth mentioning at that time is that not one single Western country has ever mentioned about Cambodia nor about democracy and human rights [*sic*], let alone coming to our rescue.[107]

Second, Prime Minister Hun Sen and his CPP colleagues claimed that they became involved in politics due to their desire to protect their country's sovereignty and independence against 'American imperialism' in the aftermath of the 1970 coup by pro-US culprits – the Lon Nol regime. Hun Sen left school in 1969 at the age of 17 and joined the communist rebellion in April 1970, shortly after hearing Sihanouk's broadcast call to arms from Beijing.[108] In June 1977, as the purges of the Eastern Zone threatened to engulf his regiment, Hun Sen defected and fled to Vietnam. From its very first day in power after the collapse of the Khmer Rouge regime in 1979, the new regime of the PRK faced a fight for its survival against the Khmer Rouge and isolation from the international community, including the

West, ASEAN and China, which were supporting and recognising the previous genocide regime. Hun Sen rose to premiership in 1985 while Cambodia was the target of Western sanctions and embargos till the creation of the second Kingdom of Cambodia in 1993. Thereafter, the West always criticised Phnom Penh for failing to uphold democratic principles. To CPP leaders, criticism is interference into domestic affairs of Cambodia. Recently, Prime Minister Hun Sen lashed out at the West, saying that the UN and Western powers "should be ashamed for continuing to support the genocide regime of Pol Pot and to allow them to occupy the Cambodian seat from 1979 through to 1991[*sic*]."[109]

Third, the Cambodian leaders have been acutely sceptical about the emergence of 'humanitarian intervention' as a norm in IR. CPP leaders particularly had been alarmed by Western interventions in other parts of the world. Western military interventions in Kosovo (1999), Iraq (2003), Libya (2011) and the ongoing proxy war in Syria have convinced leaders in Phnom Penh that small countries, like Cambodia, are prone to foreign interventions under this new guise.[110] In December 2011, at a closed meeting with Cambodian diplomats, Hun Sen stated that "one of the risks that small states are facing is foreign powers' interference under a new banner of humanitarian intervention."[111] He highlighted the lack of legality of military interventions in Kosovo and Iraq by the US and its allies. Ou Virak, president of the Future Forum, said that Hun Sen was "afraid they [the US] might do the same thing to remove the strongman from Cambodia."[112] Recently, Hun Sen blamed Western interventions for tragedies and chaos in Iraq, Libya and Syria. He stated:

> Whether you know Saddam Hussein of Iraq, Gaddafi of Libya, Assad of Syria, etc. or not, you may ask from where did those tragedies in those Arab countries come from? . . . They have sent troops in Iraq to kill Saddam Hussein because they did not like him. That they did so, has Iraq now had peace and democracy? . . . After killing Gaddafi, has Libya enjoyed peace? . . . Syria is in ruin and divided in three – one under the Government, one under the opposition supported by the US and one is under ISIS.[113]

Colour revolution in Cambodia?

Recently, the ruling CPP has doubled its rhetoric against a possible colour revolution in Cambodia. 'Colour revolution' is a term that has been widely used to describe civil resistance and political uprising against authoritarian regimes. Originally, the term was used to depict uprisings in countries in the former Soviet Union during the 2000s, including Georgia's Rose Revolution (2003), Ukraine's Orange Revolution (2004), and Kyrgyzstan's Tulip Revolution (2005). Colour revolution was widely used again to describe revolutionary waves in the Arab world in the early 2010s, known as the Arab Spring. The Arab Spring led to the collapse of authoritarian regimes in countries like Tunisia, Libya and Egypt. In Cambodia, Phnom Penh's concern over colour revolution was pronounced in the aftermath of the parliamentary election on 28 July 2013, in which the ruling CPP won 69 seats and the opposition party – Cambodian National Rescue Party

(CNRP) – won 55 seats in the election. Although the outcome shocked the ruling party, the CNRP rejected the results and demanded an independent investigation into the irregularities. A unified opposition, in the form of the CNRP, had pushed the CPP to the brink of defeat despite election observers saying there were potentially 1 million missing, duplicate and "ghost" names on the voter list, which favoured the CPP.[114] As the political deadlock unfolded, the opposition party staged a series of massive demonstrations in Phnom Penh. In response, in September 2013, the security forces launched a crackdown, which killed one demonstrator and injuring around two dozen others.[115] In its video released on 26 April 2017, the Cambodian Council of Ministers drew a comparison between the 2011 uprisings and later fighting against Bashar al-Assad's government in Syria with 2013 protests led by the CNRP. The video stated that "after the national election in 2013, extremist groups also had the intention to bring the colour revolution here in order to fulfil the position's ambition."[116]

Those demonstrations and the close consultation between the CNRP and the Western diplomatic missions in Phnom Penh, particularly the US Embassy, prompted the government to be in a state of panic over the possibility of a colour revolution. The Cambodian leaders have viewed the US with deeper suspicion for attempting to promote regime change in Cambodia. A senior official at the Cambodian Ministry of Foreign Affairs claimed that "historically, the US has always imposed its will on Cambodia" and that the "Super Power" has never respected Cambodia's sovereignty and independence.[117] He continued to argue that "the US is currently supporting the CNRP to ultimately achieve a regime change in Cambodia." With such perceptions, clear evidence is that all targets of Phnom Penh's recent crackdown are linked to the US. *The Cambodia Daily*, owned by an American family, was forced to close on 4 September 2017 over allegations that it had not paid accumulative tax of USD6.3 million to the Cambodian authorities.[118] At least 18 radio stations have been commanded to halt broadcasting the programmes of two American government-funded news organisations – the Voice of America and Radio Free Asia. The two radio broadcasters have been accused of not registering with the tax department and of not operating on official media licences. These radio stations have long been targets of the ruling CPP because they provided platforms for the critics and independents to express their critical views of the government in the local Khmer language.

Prime Minister Hun Sen and his ruling party have intensified a crackdown on independent NGOs, the media, and political parties as the July 2018 general election loomed, which the ruling party had no intention of losing. As a result, in August 2017, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) – a non-profit organisation, which was allegedly funded by American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to promote democracy – was ordered to shut down. The Cambodian government accused NDI of having a secret agenda in Cambodia. The shutdown of NDI provoked criticism from US Sen. John McCain who said that "this is just the latest action in government's campaign to silence proponents of democracy, harass civil society and restrict the media."[119] More controversially, on 2 September 2017, the CRNP president, Kem Sokha, was arrested and accused of treason for allegedly

colluding with Washington in a regime change campaign in Cambodia. The accusation was based on a statement he made in 2013 with the Cambodian community in Australia in which Sokha said that the US had extended its support, financially and technically, to the opposition since 1993 in order to "generate change in Cambodia."[120] The US Embassy denied the accusation. The US Ambassador to Cambodia stated:

> On dozens of occasions over the past year, the United States has been subject to intentional inaccurate, misleading and baseless accusations. . . . All of the accusations you have heard in recent weeks about the United States – every one of them – are false.[121]

The arrest of Kem Sokha also drew condemnations from the governments of Australia, the UK, Germany, and international organisations, including the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and the EU. Linking Kem Sokha's conspiracy with foreign powers to trigger a regime change in Cambodia, the Cambodian Supreme Court dissolved the CNRP and ordered a five-year political ban for 118 members of the opposition party on 16 November 2017.[122] In the aftermath of the court's ruling, the US State Department and the EU terminated their support for Cambodia's National Election Committee. On 6 December 2017, the State Department announced that the US would restrict visas on "individuals responsible for undermining Cambodia democracy" and demanded that

> reinstating the political opposition, releasing Kem Sokha, and allowing civil society and the media to resume their constitutionally protected activities . . . could lead to a lifting of the travel restriction and increase the potential for Cambodia's 2018 electoral process to regain legitimacy.[123]

Similarly, the European Parliament also adopted a strongly worded resolution urging the Cambodian government to reverse the campaign against democracy with threats to suspend the EU's preferential 'Everything But Arms' (EBA) scheme and to consider "possible visa restrictions and asset freezes" on individuals responsible for "serious human rights violations in Cambodia."[124] If the EU sanctions, particularly the suspension of its preferential trade arrangement for Cambodia are implemented, Cambodia's garment sector would be immediately affected as the EU alone accounts for 40 per cent of Cambodia's exports.[125]

Amidst international condemnation, mainly from the West, Phnom Penh has urged foreign powers to respect Cambodia's sovereignty and independence. Foreign Minister Prak Sokhonn demanded from foreign countries, especially the US, "mutual respect" and the recognition of Cambodia's "independence, sovereignty, neutrality and self-determination."[126] In an angry speech to a large crowd of garment workers in Phnom Penh, Prime Minister Hun Sen said:

> When [Cambodia] implements law for the sake of defending peace, security of the country, they [the West] say we are abusing human rights. When they

> gunned us down, bombed our country, they did not think of human rights. . . . We wish that our foreign friends understand our situation. However, from what had happened in the past, we knew some did not respect us.[127]

For some commentators, the CPP's crackdown on the opposition, the critics and the media since 2014 had nothing to do with the colour revolution but a veiled attempt to crush the opposition before the July 2018. For instance, Santiago argues that "it appears now that Prime Minister Hun Sen is so afraid of what might happen in a genuine vote, he won't allow for competition at all."[128] Moreover, the critics of the Hun Sen regime argue that the anti-American rhetoric is a guise for democratic regression and a pretext for tougher measures to silence the opposition party and independent voices. A Cambodian analyst Lao Monghay said:

> It isn't surprising that Hun Sen is using the word 'sovereignty' to deflect international criticism. . . . Even during Cambodia's genocide from 1975 to 1979, a senior member of the Khmer Rouge regime sent an official letter to the United Nations, telling them not to interfere in Cambodian affairs at a time when the government was killing many people and abusing their rights.[129]

As the West has doubled its pressure on Phnom Penh, Prime Minister Hun Sen won words of support from his most import ally – Beijing. When asked about the arrest of Kem Sokha at a press briefing in Beijing, a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman said that "China supports the Cambodian government's efforts to protect national security and stability."[130] Days after the arrest of Kem Sokha, the Vice Chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, Wang Jiarui, reaffirmed to Cambodian leaders during his visit to Phnom Penh that "China is behind Cambodia to help and support . . . an obstacle for Cambodia is also an obstacle for China."[131] Similarly, with regard to the dissolution of the CNRP, the Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi assured his Cambodian counterpart Prak Sokhonn that "China supports the Cambodian side's efforts to protect political stability and achieve economic development, and believes the Cambodian government can lead the people to deal with domestic and foreign challenges."[132] In this context, as long the West intensifies its political pressure and economic sanctions, Phnom Penh feels that it has no choice but to strengthen its alignment with Beijing for diplomatic and economic support, which are crucial for the ruling CPP to strengthen is popularity and thus legitimacy.

Conclusion

In addition to the important role of China for Cambodia in handling its geopolitical predicament, as discussed in earlier chapters, China's largesse and growing economic presence in Cambodia has handsomely benefited the Kingdom's ruling elite. Politically, it has allowed Cambodia to maintain high economic growth, which is the key for the CPP to enhance its legitimacy and thus maintain

its political dominance. Economically, China's 'no strings attached' economic engagement with Cambodia has also enabled CPP's leaders to either get rich or maintain the patron-client system and hence promote their political control through the strengthened legitimacy of the ruling party. More importantly, Beijing has become Phnom Penh's important diplomatic protection against external criticism and condemnation in relation to democratisation in Cambodia. Recent political developments in the Kingdom, including the surge in popularity of the opposition CNRP and the government's crackdown on its political opponents, critics, and the independent media, has pushed Phnom Penh closer towards Beijing.

With regard to recent political developments in Cambodia, the ruling CPP claims that the crackdown has been legally and historically justifiable in order to prevent a colour revolution and foreign interventions that might destroy the hard-fought peace and development in Cambodia. However, the critics argue that it is merely an undemocratic move that the CPP has adopted to maintain its power. In such a politically tense environment, Beijing's political support and economic assistance is extremely crucial for the survival of the Hun Sen regime. Moreover, the more Phnom Penh feels the heat of Western condemnation and sanctions, the stronger Cambodia's embracement of China is expected.

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8 Potential risks and costs of Cambodia's alignment with China

At a glance, China's influence in Cambodia has been markedly obvious. To Cambodian strategists, who may not admit publicly, China has recently become Cambodia's most important partner due to Beijing's increasingly crucial role in the Kingdom's security and development as discussed in the previous chapters. Moreover, the leaders in Phnom Penh seem to be convinced that the regional order in the Asia-Pacific will be Sino-centric in the near future. As a result, they want Cambodia to be on the right side of the history of the twenty-first century, of which China will be one of the most influential writers of that history. However, the perception of China's growing influence in Cambodia is far from uniform, depending on whom we are talking with. There have been concerns expressed among those who work for non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and civil society organisations, as well as international analysts, that China's unquestioning approach on how its aid and investment are used could roll back democratic reform in Cambodia. There is a concern that such an approach might also exacerbate corruption and good governance, and ruin national resources in Cambodia.

Bilaterally, Cambodia-China relationship is obviously asymmetric between a small state and a great power in which the smaller one might, to a certain extent, experience risks and vulnerabilities. The risks include potential pressure on Cambodia to compromise its sovereign right and foreign policy autonomy. In addition, Cambodia's close alignment with China might alienate Cambodia's neighbours, regional and global powers, particularly Japan and the US. Similarly, Cambodia's alignment with China has been alleged of further worsening ASEAN's internal divisions on regional hotspots, such as the South China Sea, and the regional grouping's response to the strategic competition between the great powers in the region. These present strategic dilemmas for Cambodia. This chapter, therefore, attempts to investigate the potential costs and vulnerabilities Cambodia might face from its increasing dependence on China. It looks at the potential implications of China's increasing influence over Cambodia in four main policy realms: (1) democratisation, (2) socio-economic and environmental risks; (3) foreign policy autonomy; and (4) national security.

China and regression of democratic values in Cambodia?

China's rapidly increasing presence in Cambodia has attracted a myriad of criticisms, mainly from local and international activists. One of the accusations is that China's economic engagement with and political support for Phnom Penh is a driving force of the regression of democracy and good governance in Cambodia. This section seeks to investigate whether or not Cambodia's democracy has backslidden and to what extent has China contributed to the backslide. Recently, the democratisation in Cambodia has been shaky, noticeably in the aftermath of the 2013 election. On 16 March 2018, the Australian National University organised a conference with the looming theme of 'Cambodia on the Brink: Towards the 2018 Elections,' in which the panellists shared the view that Cambodia's democracy had been in crisis.[1] In 2017, Freedom House marked Cambodia as "not free" and noticed that "the country has moved much closer to outright authoritarian rule with the banning of the main opposition party and shuttering of independent media outlets."[2] It ranked Cambodia 158 out of 208 countries and territories vis-à-vis the suppression of political rights and civil liberties.[3] Amnesty International reported that "the crackdown on human rights defenders, the media, civil society and the political opposition" has intensified.[4] Similarly, the 2018 Human Rights Watch Report emphasised:

> The civil and political rights environment in Cambodia markedly deteriorated in 2017 as the government arrested the leader of Cambodia's political opposition on dubious charges of treason; dissolved the main opposition party and banned over 100 members from political activity; intensified the misuse of the justice system to prosecute political opposition and human rights activists; and forced several independent media outlet to close.[5]

In relation to the alleged crackdown on the opposition in the aftermath of the 2013 election, critics and independent voices, including NGOs and the media, there are three main theories that explain the motives behind the political calculation of Prime Minister Hun Sen and his ruling CPP. The first theory argues that the role of China in Cambodia, particularly its firm support for the Hun Sen regime, cannot be ignored. Empirically, since autocrats are principally more reliant on repression to maintain power, they are less willing to criticise and to interfere in the domestic affairs of others, especially other repressive authoritarian regimes.[6] Logically, it can be argued that there is a common interest for authoritarian regimes to engage in mutual support. In fact, having a dictatorial neighbourhood is desirable for autocrats, because it reduces the risk of "subversive democratic spill-over effects" and the "cost of repression."[7] As a result, some observers have begun to associate the stagnation of democratisation with the phenomenon of newly emerging non-democratic powers within a changing world order, and most prominently with China.[8] Ambrosio articulates the view:

> Autocrats have a stake in ensuring that additional countries do not fall to democracy. For instance, from a regional perspective, the ability of a country

> to withstand democratic pressure benefits all authoritarian regimes in the region. If a pattern of democratic transitions is halted, this would undermine a sense of momentum and reverse any belief that the overthrow of autocratic leaders is inevitable.[9]

In the case of Cambodia, there are three possible correlations between China's growing influence and the backwardness of the Kingdom's democratisation process. First, as discussed in Chapter 7, Cambodian leaders have looked towards Beijing not only as a development model but also for governance guidance. Recently, the CPP's spokesman Sok Eysan credited the one-party model in Beijing with China's rapid economic development and questioned the US two-party system by pointing to gridlock between the US Congress and President Donald Trump over a budget bill.[10] David Hutt asserts that "Hun Sen, after years of hectoring from the EU and the US on how to promote democracy and rights, is now looking instead to Beijing's authoritarian model for advice on how to develop national institutions."[11] Second, Western leverage on Cambodia over the promotion of democratic values has significantly declined mainly due to China's largesse. Hun Sen's autocratic tendencies had been constrained by his country's reliance on western aid, which was usually tied to good governance and democratic benchmarks. In recent years, however, Cambodia has decreasingly received conditional aid and investment form Western countries, which has been replaced by China's financial largesse. Analysts fear that "billions of dollars in state-driven investment from China in recent years have allowed him [Hun Sen] to indulge his true political inclinations."[12] John Ciorciari notices that "Western donors clearly have less clout in Cambodia than they did in the past, especially as Beijing offers the CPP an alternative source of support."[13] In 2015, China invested in Cambodia around USD857 million, making up roughly 61 per cent of total FDI in the Kingdom and channelled USD320 million in aid, which accounted for 30 per cent of total foreign aid to Cambodia. By contrast, investment and foreign aid from Western countries has been on the decline. According to Carlyle Thayer, Cambodia's dependence on China for development assistance means that "CPP officials will not have to fear external pressures to act on corruption."[14]

Third, China's political support has, to some extent, allowed Phnom Penh to be confident that the cost of anti-democratic discourse is not too high. Politically, Prime Minister Hun Sen has continuously won words of support from his most important allies in Beijing as discussed in Chapter 7. This can serve as an insurance policy for the ruling CPP as the possibility of foreign aid cuts and trade restrictions by Western governments as the result of the dissolution of the CNRP is on horizon. The scrapping the EU's 'Everything But Arms' (EBA) preferential trade arrangement and the US's zero tariffs for apparel products could have devastating economic consequences for Cambodian economy. European and American markets are vital to Cambodia's almost USD7 billion garment industry, which accounts for 80 per cent of the country's exports. However, the efficacy of the economic sanction will be likely undermined by a resurgent China seeking to protect its interests in the region. A senior government official is convinced that as China's economic

presence and strategic interest in Cambodia is growing, Beijing will do whatever possible to protect the CPP and thus its interests in the Kingdom.[15]

The second theory suggests that the rise of Trump to the White House has been a contributing factor for the retreat of democratic values in many countries, including Cambodia. Trump's transactional foreign policy and lack of interest in promoting the American values signalled to the Cambodian ruling elite that there would be no significant costs for their undemocratic actions against the opposition and critics. The Trump administration's daily attacks against the mainstream media as 'fake news' provide a green light for authoritarian regimes to oppress the freedom of press in their country. The president of the UN Human Rights Council, Zeid bin Ra'ad has warned that "the demonization of the press in the US is poisonous because it has consequences elsewhere."[16] Prime Minister Hun Sen has repeatedly cited President Trump's criticism of the media in the US and provided his own opinion:

> CNN deserves the ranting of President Donald Trump. . . . His ranting is right. I would like to send a message to the President that your attack on CNN is right. The American media is very bad.[17]

For the political opponents and critics of the CPP, fake news has been an excuse for the ruling party to attack anyone who criticise the Cambodian government. Linking Trump's attacks against the American mainstream media to the freedom of press in Cambodia, the former president of the opposition CNRP, Sam Raingsy argues:

> The President's [Trump] tone, priorities, actions and inactions are facilitating a striking authoritarian drift in Cambodia and elsewhere. . . . Dictators around the world feel encouraged. . . . Hun Sen is benefitting from the eclipse of America, the loss of influence of the US under Donald Trump, his lack of interest in human rights in far-away countries. . . . The US is very weak. . . . Before the US acted as brake for dictators [*sic*], but the US is no longer playing its role. . . . Hun Sen knows he can do what he wants. . . . Donald Trump doesn't care about countries like Cambodia.[18]

The third theory argues that the regression of Cambodia's democracy was due to the concern that Prime Minister Hun Sen and his ruling CPP have had following the disappointing results of the 2013 national election and especially the 2017 commune election in which the opposition party, CNRP, made unprecedented gains. For instance, Charles Santiago, a member of the Malaysian Parliament and Chairman of the ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights stated:

> With the national elections on the horizon, it is clear that it is nothing more than a thinly veiled attempt to crush the opposition before the campaign even starts. For months, we have been witnessing the escalation of the government attempts to cripple the opposition, but it appears now that Prime Minister

> Hun Sen is so afraid of what might happen in a genuine vote, he won't allow for competition at all.[19]

By and large, democratisation is not a linear process. One must expect that the process includes two steps forwards, one step backward and sometimes one step sideway. To be fair, therefore, any assessment on Cambodia's democratisation process must be made both in relative and absolute terms. In a relative term, Cambodia has scored relatively high compared to a number of other countries Southeast Asia, including Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar or even Thailand and the Philippines, on the promotion of democratic values and the protection of human rights. In an absolute term, Cambodia's democracy is currently progressing compared to the situation 10 or 15 years ago. Cambodia has lately been criticised for narrowing freedom space despite the fact that hundreds NGOs and civil society organisations are operating their missions and even criticising the government on a daily basis. Moreover, there are around 800 print media organisations, 70 online publications, 22 TV stations, 330 radio stations and 38 journalist associations.[20] The freedom space has been further promoted by digital platforms, especially Facebook. Prime Minister Hun Sen and other Cambodian leaders are active subscribers of this platform, where all the Cambodian people can directly channel concerns and needs to their Prime Minister, ministers and lawmakers.

Nevertheless, one must admit the fact that Cambodia's democracy has backslidden over the past few years. As discussed earlier, China's increasing influence in Cambodia might be one of the contributing factors of the backslide. The underlying factor, however, is that Prime Minister Hun Sen is planning for the leadership succession, presumably to his eldest son Hun Manet. Some Cambodian analysts believe that the CNRP's increasing popularity had presented a more challenging political competition not only to the CPP but also to the legitimacy of Prime Minister Hun Sen within his own party, which in turn might ruin his power succession plan. In such a critical time, Hun Sen needs to exert an absolute control of Cambodia's political landscape through both the promotion of the legitimacy of his ruling CPP and his command in the ruling party as well as oppression of opposition parties and critical voices.[21]

Socio-economic and environmental costs

The Cambodian government has praised China for its no-strings attached assistance and 'win-win' investment. However, a prominent Cambodian scholar, Ambassador Pou Sothirak, said that "there is no such a thing as a free lunch."[22] In return for its largesse, he argues, China demands three important things from Cambodia. First, Beijing needs loyalty from Phnom Penh in protecting China's interests. Second, China has been thirsty for Cambodia's natural resources, including oil, timber, minerals and agriculture land. Finally, Cambodia has been seen as Beijing's 'wild card' in promoting China's strategic interests in the region, including in the South China Sea. Moreover, China's growing economic presence in Cambodia is far from uncontroversial. China's economic engagement in

the Kingdom has caused public discontent mainly because Chinese investment projects are not socially inclusive and environmentally friendly. Some within civil society and grassroots organisations have raised concerns with regard to Chinese projects on the issues of resettlement and compensation, environmental degradation and land grabbing. The CPP's political opponents have been keen to capitalise on public frustration with the adverse social and environmental effects of Cambodia's growing ties to China and the depletion of the country's natural resources. The opposition lawmaker, Son Chhay, said:

> Chinese investors are aggressive business people who capitalize on Cambodia. . . . They are given special rights by the government [that] invariably agrees with what they want [*sic*]. . . . If the government doesn't take action and improve their management of laws and principles, Cambodia will lose its current resources and there will be no reason for other people to invest in the country.[23]

Although some have politicised China's growing economic presence in Cambodia, the Cambodian government needs serious studies of the negative impacts of Chinese investment to ensure the sustainable and inclusive economic growth of the Kingdom. While, the investment in critical infrastructure is needed for Cambodia's economic development and national security, it is also equally imperative that the social and environmental consequences of the investment need to be adequately addressed. It is argued that economic ties to China have become often linked to the issue of land grabbing. The Chinese-funded Boeung Kak Lake project in downtown Phnom Penh has been among the most controversial. In 2007, the Shukaku Inc – a joint venture between Lao Meng Khin, a CPP tycoon senator with close personal ties with Prime Minister Hun Sen, and a Chinese firm, Erdos Hong Jun Investment Co., Ltd – was awarded a 99-year economic concession to turn Boeung Kak Lake into apartments and shopping malls.[24] Allegedly, with little consultation with the residents, the deal allowed Shukaku to fill the city's largest lake with sand, which caused "serious flooding in the surrounding villages, leading many families to pack up and leave because their home became uninhabitable."[25] As a result, a series of public protests unfolded. The government reportedly repressed and jailed several community leaders, which drew criticism from human right groups. The World Bank, which had lent Cambodia about USD50–70 million annually, stopped providing loans and would not resume lending to the Kingdom until the government found a solution to help hundreds of families facing eviction from land around the lake.[26] As the World Bank suspended its financial support in response to the mass forced eviction of villagers from the Boueng Kak Lake development area in Phnom Penh, Cambodia simply turned to China for financial support.[27]

In another case, a China-backed sugarcane plantation in Preah Vihear province has allegedly destroyed the livelihoods of residents, despite officials claim that the project will bring prosperity to the region by creating new jobs. A USD300 million sugarcane-processing factory began producing sugar in February 2016.

Described as the world's largest such factory by the local media, the plantation produces about 1,000 tons of sugar per day to supply the domestic, regional and global markets.[28] Four subsidiaries of Hengfu Group Sugar Industry Co., Ltd. based in Guangdong province – were granted more than 40,000 hectares through five separate 70-year Economic Land Concessions (ELCs) in 2011. The move allowed Hengfu to circumvent a law that prevents any one entity from receiving a concession of more than 10,000 hectares from the Cambodian government.[29] The companies started to demarcate villagers' land and community forests for the development of sugarcane plantations, and cleared the area by cutting down valuable resin trees, which support the livelihood of the local community, mostly the Kouy ethnic minority. It is reported that no measures were taken regarding an environmental or social impact assessment. The villagers filed a lawsuit against the companies, demanding a collective compensation of USD600,000 for the destruction of their ancestral lands, community forests, and farming lands.[30] Residents also complained that their traditional sources of income – mushrooms, leaves, vines, resin, fruits and fish from local forests and creeks – had largely dried up since the companies began developing the land.[31] As no resolution had been devised, a series of protests were orchestrated by the villagers, NGO activists, and Buddhist monks. In several occasions, the local authorities arrested the protestors and the company filed a lawsuit against them for destroying their sugarcane.

By the same token, China has been accused of providing huge project-related loans to Cambodia without transparency and much less environmental or social-impact assessments. Among the conditions of Chinese aid is China's access to resources in Cambodia, particularly energy. In 2004–2005, the US energy firm Chevron discovered hydrocarbon deposits in Cambodia's coastal waters in the Gulf of Thailand and estimated the available oil to be between USD700 million to USD2 billion barrels.[32] China has competed for rights to drill in the six identified offshore blocks with oil and gas deposits. In 2007, Cambodia awarded exclusive exploration and production rights in one of the blocks to the state-owned China National Offshore Oil Company (CNOOC), which began drilling its first well in December 2011.[33] Cambodia gave the other five blocks to other bidders, two of which had close links to China. In late 2012, another Chinese state-owned firm also agreed to build Cambodia's first oil refinery in partnership with the state-owned Cambodian Petrochemical Company.[34] These Chinese companies have been accused of having a bad reputation with regard to their involvement in corruption practices with local authorities. As a result, there is a concern that by doing business with the Chinese, "Cambodia would be afflicted by a resource curse" – a phenomenon in which discoveries of oil or other natural resources do not lead to economic development and social progress because "corrupt officials pocket the money or squander it on grandiose projects."[35]

China has also sought access to timber, mining, and other resources. Many of the companies that have been involved in logging in Cambodia are Chinese-owned or joint ventures, including Wuzhinshan, Pheapimex, and Green Rich. Those companies have frequently been accused of illegal logging. In a northeast province of Cambodia, Chinese firms have extensive land concessions. Cambodian Deputy

Prime Minister Sar Khen reportedly said that the area around one Chinese gold mine "is like a country within a country" where the Cambodian police cannot enter.[36] It is reported once that high-level approvals are issued, Chinese firms are subject to few checks by the local authorities who often conspire in illicit or environmentally unfriendly activities in exchange for side payments.[37] This system puts Chinese firms, to some degree, above the law and offers personal benefits to local officials.

Opposition to such arrangements has been sometimes met with brutal responses. In 2012, environmental activist Chut Wutty was killed while investigating illegal logging in protected areas of the Central Cardammon Forest around a Chinese-built dam project.[38] Hydropower plants seem to be the most controversial projects, despite being one of the top priorities of the Cambodian government. For instance, the 260-Megawat Stung Cheay Areng Dam has been postponed due to protests from the local community and environmental NGOs. The 400-Megawat Lower Sesan II hydropower project caused the dislocation of about five thousand people and threatened the biodiversity of the Mekong River. What concerns critics of Cambodia's prioritisation of hydropower projects is China's apparent willingness to ignore social and environmental consequences in favour of immediate and short-term socio-economic and political returns for the Cambodian government and Chinese corporations. China-funded projects are usually implemented without serious environmental impact assessments (EIA) and social impact assessments (SIA).[39] Sullivan investigated the Kamchay dam in Kampot province and found that public consultation and participation in the EIA process was virtually non-existent.[40] This has been echoed by a Cambodian environmentalist researcher who sent a few months in the region doing his fieldwork.[41] The Kamchay project was conceived and planned behind closed doors between the government and the Chinese companies' representatives without serious consideration to mitigate and deal with any adverse environmental and social effects.[42] The dam was built in Bokor National Park in which inhabits 37 species of mammals, 68 bird species, 23 reptile species, and 32 fish species.[43] Moreover, in order to make way for the project's facilities, large areas have been deforested. Even worse, illegal logging has taken place in areas outside the project areas.[44] It is argued that local communities who rely on non-limber forest products for their livelihoods were affected most by the project as access to the most productive areas has been restricted by the project.

More recently, many in Cambodia have been concerned by the flood of Chinese tourists and investors, who have altered the landscape of Cambodia's coastal city of Sihanoukville.[45] In the first nine months of 2017, Chinese arrivals in the coastal city skyrocketed by 170 per cent, reaching almost 88,000 people.[46] The coastal region has become an attractive destination for Chinese investors to set up casinos, luxury resorts, street shops, and restaurants to meet increasing demands from the influx of Chinese tourists. It was also primarily due to the creation of the Sihanouk Special Economic Zone where 90 per cent of the 110 companies operating there are owned Chinese who are enjoying tax-free imports and exports and corporate tax holidays.[47] 2017 also witnessed a dramatic surge in Chinese visitors mainly drawn to Chinese-run casinos. As of February 2018, there were 24 legally

registered casinos in this small city making it the 'New Macau.' It is reported that due to a lack of effective government regulations in the gambling sector and the authorities' apparent willingness to accept bribes, it is easier to get a licence to run a casino than to open a restaurant.[48]

Despite the economic potential of hotels, casinos, and an increasing number of tourist arrivals, negative headlines have been reported about crimes related to money laundering, illegal casino operations, human trafficking, kidnapping, and cybercrimes. In a report to the Cambodian Interior Minister Sar Kheng, Preah Sihanouk Governor Yun Min said that "the Chinese who are part of the mafia do criminal activities and kidnap the Chinese investors and create an insecure environment in the province."[49] In October 2017, the Cambodian authorities arrested at least 345 Chinese nationals implicated in illicit online gaming and cyber extortion.[50] Economically, it is reported that the local community has benefited less from Chinese tourist visitors as the Chinese have their own tourism operators, restaurants and buses that bring tourists from the airport directly to casinos and resorts.[51] To run this chain of operations, Chinese migrants, instead of locals, have been recruited. As a result, along with the influx of Chinese investors and tourists, the number of the Chinese requesting work permits in the province increased markedly to around 4,498 in 2017.[52] Moreover, local visitors who used to enjoy their holidays in the coastal city have complained about the skyrocketed prices of accommodation and the shortage of hotel rooms, as there is a high demand by the Chinese. It is also reported that "Chinese-operated hotels and restaurants serve exclusively Chinese tourists and are unavailable to local or other tourists during national holidays."[53] Local communities and visitors have also criticised the misbehaviour of the Chinese in the city due to their smoking habit, careless and rude driving, and arrogance.[54]

Risks from Cambodia's growing dependence on China

Over the last decade, Cambodia appears comfortably ensconced in China's embrace due to China's largesse and Phnom Penh's perception of its immediate neighbours – Vietnam and Thailand – as historic predators of Khmer lands. Moreover, China has recently played a pivotal role in ensuring the regime survival in Phnom Penh. Given mounting pressure from the West on the ruling CPP following the dissolution of the country's biggest opposition on 16 November 2017, there is a concern that Phnom Penh might be further pushed economically and politically into China's orbit to a point where Cambodia would lose its foreign policy autonomy and be heavily indebted by the Chinese largesse in what known as 'China's debt-trap diplomacy.'

China's 'debt-trap diplomacy' in Cambodia?

Cambodian and Chinese leaders have highlighted the importance of bilateral relations between their two countries. In a press conference, China's Foreign Ministry spokesman stated: "China and Cambodia are good neighbours, good friends, good partners and good brothers . . . and that China-Cambodia relations became a

model for state-to-state exchanges."[55] Sous Yara, Member of the National Assembly and Vice-Chairman of CPP's External Relations Committee, also took a complimentary tone by stating:

> China is the engine of global growth and a core development and strategic partner of Cambodia . . . although Cambodia and China have different political ideologies and systems, they still can work closely together to advance their common interests . . . although China is much bigger and stronger than Cambodia, in terms of size and power, both countries treat each other equally and with mutual respect.[56]

However, not all Cambodians agree with such rhetoric. One member of the Cambodian intellectual network – CAMPRO – drew an analogy between China's relationship to Cambodia and a marriage in which a husband who has all economic power over a weak and dependent wife. She claimed:

> Everything is fine when the relationship is good and everyone behaves, but if there is conflict in the relationship (i.e. beating or cheating), what are the options the wife could take. If she divorces him, she will suffer economically, emotionally and physically, she will lose her home, her source of income, and her children. If she stays in the abusive relationship, she will need to suffer quietly and continue to allow her husband to abuse her and continue to do whatever he wants, she has no say/voice.[57]

There has been an increasing concern among Cambodian scholars that Cambodia might become ensnared in China's debt trap as Chinese leaders have excelled in the use of economic tools to entice smaller states, such as Sri Lanka and Djibouti, into its trap. Unlike the financial support from the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, Chinese loans are "collateralized by strategically important natural assets with high long-term value, even if they lack short-term commercial viability."[58] Moreover, it is argued that Chinese investors are looking for "quick money and do not usually strike a balance between development and sustainability."[59] Brahma Chellaney asserts that "the projects that China is supporting are often intended not to support the local economy, but to facilitate Chinese access to natural resources, or to open the market for low-cost and shoddy Chinese good."[60] Broadly, the main objectives of China's lending are to address overcapacity at home by boosting exports and to advance its strategic interest, including expanding its diplomatic influence, securing natural resources, promoting the international use of its currency and gaining a relative advantage over other powers.

A Chinese-funded project in Sri Lanka is a good example. Mattala Rajapaksa International Airport, the second largest in Sri Lanka, which was built to welcome a million of passengers per year, currently receives about a dozen passengers per day.[61] As of 2016, the Sri Lankan government obtained an annual revenue of around USD300,000 from the airport but had to repay China USD23.6 million a year for

the next eight years. Sri Lanka's debt to China continuously increased. Sadly, in exchange for writing off USD1.1 billion of the country's debt, the Sri Lankan government had to give China control of its deepwater port in Hambantota – a 70 per cent equity stake over 99 years.[62] It is a strategic asset for Beijing as the port sits on a very strategic location, just a few kilometres north of the vital India Ocean shipping lane over which more than 80 per cent of China's imported oil travels. Examining Sri Lanka's disastrous experience, Ronak Desai warns that Pakistan would inevitably become another victim of China's 'debt-trap diplomacy' following the Trump administration's decision to suspend more than USD1 billion security assistance to Islamabad.[63] Similarly, after lending billions of dollars to heavily indebted Djibouti, China established its first overseas military base in that tiny but strategic state. Kenya's crushing debt to China now threatens to turn its busy port of Mombasa – a gateway to East Africa – into another Hambantota.[64] It is also argued that several other countries, from Argentina to Namibia and Laos, have been ensnared in a Chinese debt trap, forcing them to confront agonising choices in order to stave off default.[65] In this regard, Chellaney warns that "China's real objectives were commercial penetration and strategic leverage; by then it was too late, and countries were trapped in a vicious cycle."[66]

These experiences should serve as a warning sign that states caught in debt bondage to China risk losing both their most valuable natural assets and their very sovereignty in what Amanda Hodge calls "the new imperial giant's iron fist" cloaked with "velvet glove."[67] Cambodian Foreign policy analysts have been frightened by these developments. They warn that Cambodia might be trapped in China's "easy money."[68] Nowadays, China is Cambodia's largest foreign donor. However, many aid agreements between the two nations lack transparency, raising questions about whether Beijing is trying to buy influence in the country and how the money is being spent. Since 2002, Beijing has provided Phnom Penh with nearly USD3 billion in loans for 47 development projects and USD180 million in grants for 10 another projects.[69] Vongsey Vissoth, Secretary of State at the Cambodian Ministry of Economics and Finance confirmed that, as of early 2016, China accounted for 45 per cent of Phnom Penh's total foreign debt.

During his visit to Phnom Penh in January 2018, Chinese Premier Li Kequiang announced a series of large aid packages to Cambodia. A total of 19 agreements worth billions of dollars were signed, including a USD2 billion agreement to build a 190 km expressway liking Phnom Penh to the coastal city of Sihanoukville.[70] China also pledged to support a joint investment project for the launch of Cambodia's first communication satellite worth USD150 million.[71] Noticeably, with Chinese bank cheques, the Cambodian government has approved plans to build two new airports – a USD1.5 billion airport about 30 kilometres south of Phnom Penh and a USD880 million airport in Siam Reap.[72] The airport near Phnom Penh will be the ninth-largest airport in the world, which will be funded by the state-run China Development Bank. Sophal Ear warns that easy money from China might turn the two new airports into yet another Hambantota.[73]

The Cambodian government has ruled out any debt-trap possibility in Cambodia. A senior Cambodian government official said with confidence that "Cambodia

only borrows loans according to the country's needs and foreign loans need to be concessional with long grace period."[74] He added that Cambodia's macroeconomic environment has been stable with low inflation, stable domestic currency, and low public debt. At the end of 2017, the public debt outstanding amounted only to 30.2 per cent of GDP at around US$6.67 billion, of which 0.04 per cent was public domestic debt.

Erosion of Cambodia's foreign policy autonomy?

On the diplomatic front, there are certain dilemmas and constraints that Phnom Penh might have to face in the Cambodia-China asymmetric relationship. On the one hand, deepened economic ties between Cambodia and China significantly contribute to strengthening the performance legitimacy of the Cambodian government, as discussed in Chapter 7. On the other hand, economic overdependence on China imposes certain constraints on Cambodia's foreign policy options as China's economic clout in the Kingdom has translated into political influence. Obviously, Phnom Penh has lately been very mindful and supportive of Beijing's foreign policy interests. As previously discussed, Cambodia has recently become much closer to China in almost every respect, leading some scholars to label Cambodia-China relations as a client-patron relationship. Prime Minister Hun Sen has described China as a "most trustworthy friend" while Xi Jinping reciprocated with his description of Hun Sen as the "ironclad friend."[75] Some Cambodian experts have raised concerns that China has influenced Cambodia's foreign policy on certain regional issues, such as the South and East China issues.[76] Sophal Ear warns:

> At some point, you owe a country so much that they own you. It's true of foreign aid from not just China but from any single source that becomes overwhelmingly large as a share of your overall debt profile. They demand to build a military base – or port – on your land. They're already building two airports. You cannot say no. You become a province to them.[77]

Due to the increasing importance of China for Cambodia, Phnom Penh has increasingly accommodated China's interests, which include upholding the 'one-China policy,' protecting and promoting Chinese economic and cultural interests in Cambodia, and supporting China's positions on many issues, as discussed in Chapter 4. As China's influence grows, Cambodian leaders have also been more sensitive to protect China from human rights critiques. For instance, before the 2008 Beijing Olympics, activists sought to protest China's support for Sudan over Darfur by lighting an Olympic-style torch outside the Toul Sleng Genocide Museum in Phnom Penh – a reminder of China's support for the Pol Pot regime. The Cambodian authorities blocked the protesters from the site and accused the protest leader – America Actress Mia Farrow – of having a "political agenda against China."[78]

The relationship has begun to carry more diplomatic costs for Cambodia, as Beijing has increasingly demanded for Cambodia's support for its interests. In December 2009, Cambodia was strongly criticised by the international community

for deporting 20 Uighur asylum seekers to China. They were members of a Turkic-speaking Muslim minority group from Xinjiang province who had fled a "harsh official crackdown," following protests in July that had developed into one of the worst episodes of ethnic violence in China.[79] As one of the few Asian countries to have signed the 1951 UN Refugee Convention, Cambodia was legally obliged to conduct a fair assessment of the Uighurs' asylum claims and to prevent their 'refoulement' – return to the country where they were likely to face mistreatment. However, when the story broke, the Chinese government immediately called the Uighurs criminals and demanded their return to China. Faced with a choice between the Chinese demand and its obligation under the Refugee Convention, the Cambodian government opted for the former. Just two days after the deportation, then Vice President Xi Jinping arrived in Phnom Penh and announced a new USD1.2 billion package of grants and soft loans.[80] It is worth noticing that in a leaked US cable, Cambodian Deputy Prime Minister Sar Kheng informed UN Refugee Agency representative before deporting the Uighurs that Cambodia was in a "difficult position due to pressure from outside forces," which US Ambassador Carol Rodlley interpreted as a reference to Chinese demand.[81] The US State Department stated that it was "deeply disturbed" at the deportation of the Uighur asylum seekers from Cambodia back to China and that the deportation "will affect Cambodia's relationship with the US and its international standing."[82]

In March 2012, Prime Minister Hun Sen and President Hu Jintao agreed on a four-pillar proposal to build upon the "Comprehensive Strategic Partnership of Cooperation" between Cambodia and China, which was established in 2010. The first three parts were related to increased governmental communication and official exchanges, trade and investment, and security and military cooperation. The fourth pillar is of special attention as it stated:

> China and Cambodia should manage to make multilateral coordination closer, strengthen mutual support, and promote communication, coordination and cooperation with the frameworks of the UN, East Asia cooperation, the ASEAN Regional Forum, the Greater Mekong Sub-region to safeguard the common interest of the two countries.[83]

According to Ciorciari, the term "coordination" suggests that China has exerted its clout to shape Cambodia's diplomacy on a wider range of issues, including the South China Sea.[84] Cambodia's position on the South China Sea, which has been seen as support for China when the Kingdom was the Chair of ASEAN in 2012, has brought criticism upon Phnom Penh from other ASEAN member states, particularly Vietnam and the Philippines. Moreover, the Cambodian government has extended its unwavering support for all Chinese regional initiatives, such as the New Asian Security Concept, BRI, and the creation of the AIIB, as discussed in Chapter 6. Phnom Penh has increasingly used Beijing's diplomatic clichés, such as non-interference into each other's internal affairs, win-win cooperation, mutual respect, and equal sovereignty. Interestingly, Beijing and Phnom Penh seem to adopt a similar position

on the new norm of R2P, as detailed in Chapter 7. At the international arena, Cambodia has constantly supported Beijing-proposed candidates in key international organisations, including the Council of the International Maritime Organization, the UN Human Rights Council, International Law Commission, Interpol, and so on. Although mutual support between states is common in multilateral diplomacy, Cambodia's voting behaviour gives an impression that China's influence in the Kingdom continues to surge and that Cambodia keeps falling into China's orbit. Whether such a perception is most of the time misleading and therefore untrue, it does matter in IR. Being perceived as China's client state has damaged Cambodia's effort to exercise its role in ASEAN, the UN, and other forums.

While acknowledging that Beijing's increasing pressure and demand for Cambodia to protect China's interests is sometimes frustrating, a senior official at the Cambodian Ministry of Foreign Affairs plays down that Cambodia should not expect more.[85] He added that "there is not such a thing as a free lunch in this world" and that reciprocity has been and will remain the basic principle of IR. The US and the EU have been far more assertive and bullying in demanding Cambodia to support their interests.[86] In fact, he continued, China's economic, political, and military support has enabled Cambodia to maintain economic growth, defend its independence and sovereignty, and safeguard its territorial integrity.[87]

Potential security risks of Cambodia's alignment with China

Since 1993, Cambodians have been divided on their country's foreign policy orientation. The division has worsened in recent years. The CPP is increasingly embracing China as its performance-based legitimacy depends very much on the support assistance from China amidst mounting pressure from the West. Some political opponents of the ruling CPP have even compared Beijing's protection of the Hun Sen government to Chinese support for the Pol Pot regime. The CNRP has, on the other hand, continued to lean towards the US and other Western powers amidst repression and crackdown from the ruling CPP. Given the concern that Cambodia might irreversibly fall into China's orbit and Washington's desire to turn Cambodia into a democratic model for the Mekong region, Phnom Penh's growing anti-America tone might run a risk of the US's further intervention in the Kingdom.[88] Cambodia's history suggests that alienating one foreign power might invite the intervention of that great power into Cambodia's politics. The history of Cambodia during the Cold War can be used as a referral point. As discussed in Chapter 2, Prince Sihanouk's anti-American rhetoric ended with a coup against his regime by a pro-American forces led by Marshall Lon Lol in March 1970, while Lon Lol's war against the Communists resulted in the victory of the Chinese-backed Communist regime of the Khmer Rouge in April 1975. More often than not, Cambodia has been very vulnerable to fall into the great powers politics and might repeat the bitter experience of the past. Moreover, Phnom Penh's deteriorating ties with Washington have generated increasing pressure from not only the US but also from American allies, such as Japan, Australia, and the EU, on Cambodia.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the US and its allies have generated mounting international pressure against the Hun Sen government. US Senator Ben Cardin and seven of his bipartisan colleagues wrote a letter dated 25 January 2018 to the US Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley, requesting that she use the influence of her office and the tools within the international organisation, to isolate and pressure the Cambodian government. On 9 February 2018, a bill titled "Cambodia Accountability and Return on Investment Act of 2018" was introduced in the US Senate to impose an array of sanctions on Cambodia and postpone any discussion of forgiving the country's war-era debt.[89] The bill also supports visa bans for high-ranking officials "involved in undermining democracy," a measure already approved by the Trump administration in December 2017. It would also freeze the US assets of officials covered by the visa ban and require financial institutions to declare all property those officials own in the US. The legislation would oblige US representatives of international financial institutions to oppose any loans or financial assistance to the Cambodian government, "other than to meet basic human needs." In a rare move, in early February 2018, a motion was raised by Australian lawmaker Mark Butler, Federal President of the Australian Labour Party, to press the Turnbull government to take action to defend Cambodia's "fledgling democracy."[90]

Noticeably, some governments in Southeast Asia have been frustrated by Phnom Penh's alleged pro-China positions, particularly on the South China Sea. As discussed in Chapter 6, Cambodia has been seen as a spoiled member of ASEAN; and its perceived pro-China stance has been considered a risk to the ASEAN unity. Recently, ASEAN diplomats, particularly the Singaporeans and Vietnamese, have been annoyed by China's unconditional political support for the ruling CPP.[91] Therefore, it can be anticipated that Cambodia's increasing alignment with China will further alienate other ASEAN members and thus put Cambodia's image in the region at risk. More unfortunately, Cambodia's tightening alignment with China has angered Phnom Penh's former ally – Hanoi. As discussed in Chapter 6, the Cambodia-Vietnam border disputes and diplomatic tensions between the countries might suggest that Phnom Penh-Hanoi ties are no longer a special relationship. The bilateral relationship has lately been improved as Hanoi has come to realise that it could not compete for influence with China in Cambodia.[92] Nevertheless, there has been an increasing concern among Vietnamese strategists and security analysts that the influx of Chinese investors in the Cambodian coastal cities in key industries, airports and deep-water ports might turn the coastal region into China's "quasi-military base."[93] Over the last decade, China has rapidly invested in the maritime infrastructure, especially ports stretching from the eastern coast of Africa to South China Sea. Since 2005, the 'String of Pearls' concept has been promoted to suggest that China would use friendly coastal states of along the Pacific and Indian Oceans to create de facto overseas military bases for China's naval forces.[94] After announcing BRI in late 2013, Chinese firms have pledged billions of dollars to develop maritime ports and related projects across the region that are viewed as "vehicles with which China can cultivate political influence to constrain recipient countries and build dual-use

infrastructure to facilitate Beijing's long-range naval operations."[95] The concern has been intensified by the turning of heavily indebted Djibouti to China's first overseas military base in August 2017.

This concern has also been expressed by some Cambodian policymakers and scholars who articulated the view that if Phnom Penh allows China's quasi-military base to be built, Cambodia's fundamental principle of neutrality and non-alignment will be seriously violated.[96] It is speculated that Hanoi considers China's military base in Cambodia as a red line as it might give Beijing a strategic asset in pursuing its claim in the South China Sea and exerting its dominant role in region. If this perception is growing among strategists in Hanoi, there is a risk that the Vietnamese leaders might take pre-emptive moves to prevent a possibility that a Chinese military base is taking shape in Cambodia. First, it is argued that Hanoi might exploit the divisions within the ruling CPP. As Hun Sen has been seen to excessively push Cambodia's alignment with China, there seems to be two emerging camps within the CPP that have exerted their influence on Cambodia's foreign policy: the pro-China and pro-Vietnam camps. Second, as discussed in Chapter 6, there is a perception among Cambodian strategists and scholars that Vietnam has worked closely with a few ASEAN members, noticeably the Philippines and Singapore, to pressure Cambodia to back away from supporting China on the South China Sea since 2012. More interestingly, in August 2017, Cambodia-Laos relations became sour due to tense military confrontation along the border after 40 Laotian soldiers were accused of occupying Cambodia's territory in Stung Treng province. In response, Prime Minister Hun Sen ordered the mobilisation of the Cambodian armed forces to the areas and gave Vientiane an ultimatum to withdraw the 40 soldiers from the area.[97] Although the tensions subsided after the meetings between the Prime Ministers of the two countries both in Vientiane and Phnom Penh, the Cambodian leaders perceived the border confrontation in terms of a deeper geopolitical complexity, with the belief that Hanoi was behind Laos' "border aggression."[98]

Conclusion

China's unconditional support for Prime Minister Hun Sen and his ruling CPP has prompted a small proportion of Cambodian public to recall the Beijing-supported Khmer Rouge regime in 1970–1975, which was responsible for the death of almost 2 million Cambodian people. Some Cambodian intellectuals have expressed their frustration over Beijing's explicit support for the Hun Sen government and asked tough questions related to China's growing influence in Cambodia and its implications for the democratic process, good governance, and sustainable development of the Kingdom. Therefore, it can be argued that without a new approach to win heart and mind of the general public, Beijing's current foreign policy towards Cambodia might serve only its short-term interests, including Phnom Penh's support for its interest in the South China Sea. However, it might damage China's long-term interest in the Kingdom, especially among young, well-educated Cambodians who will in future take the steering wheel of their country's direction.

For its part, Phnom Penh is now facing security dilemmas from Cambodia's increasing tight alignment with China. China has increasingly become crucial for the security and survival of Cambodia and the legitimacy of the CPP. However, Cambodia's increasing alignment with China might alienate other major great powers, especially the US, and thus invite those powers to interfere into Cambodia's domestic affairs. Cambodia might be caught in strategic rivalry between the great powers. Chheang Vannarith warns that Cambodia would risk "falling into the trap of superpower politics."[99] Worse still, Phnom Penh's excessively tight alignment with China might force Hanoi to take pre-emptive steps to protect its strategic interests in Cambodia and the region. Ironically, Phnom Penh's very efforts to address the security threats from Vietnam might intensify the threats as Hanoi considers Cambodia's increasingly tight alignment with China detrimental to its interests in the region.

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9 Overall assessments and policy recommendations

Cambodia's foreign policy has recently attracted considerable attention from an increasing number of scholars and political commentators, who mostly criticise Cambodia for being China's proxy within ASEAN. It is widely perceived that Phnom Penh has been bought by Beijing's largesse, as China has become Cambodia's largest benefactor. Some express fear that China's rapidly increasing influence in Cambodia has irreversibly pushed Phnom Penh into Beijing's orbit. The commonly cited basis for such an assessment is the failure for the first time of ASEAN Foreign Ministers to issue a joint communiqué in July 2012 while Cambodia was assuming the ASEAN Chairmanship, allegedly due to Phnom Penh's pro-China position on the South China Sea.

Generally, the existing literature on Cambodia's foreign policy fails to deeply comprehend its strategic and economic interests as well as security concerns with which Cambodian foreign policymakers have been preoccupied. For Cambodian leaders, Beijing has been the most important strategic partner for not only economic prosperity but also the security of Cambodia. More importantly, Cambodia's strategic options are limited as a significant large number of Cambodian foreign policymakers are of the view that no other country comes close to China in meeting Cambodia's economic and security needs. Cambodia's domestic political dynamics and perceived foreign interference have pushed Phnom Penh towards Beijing for support and assistance. This chapter attempts to sum up key findings related to the compelling factors shaping Cambodia's foreign policy towards China as well as the constraints and challenges that Phnom Penh is facing from its increasingly close ties with Beijing. It also seeks to conceptualise Cambodia's strategic direction towards China. Finally, this chapter proposes some recommendations for Cambodian foreign policymakers and strategists to maximise the benefits from the rise of China while minimising potential risks and challenges that might derive from Cambodia's asymmetric relationship with this great power.

Compelling factors shaping Cambodia's relations with China

The long history of Cambodia's search for security and survival provides important insights into how the foreign policy of this small state has been shaped. The

author of this book finds that there are three main characteristics in Cambodia's diplomatic tradition, which remain relevant in understanding the country's foreign policy behaviour. First, Cambodia's geography and history of being surrounded by two powerful and historically antagonistic neighbours – Thailand and Vietnam – has been a persistent compelling factor shaping the country's strategic direction. This factor continues to shape Cambodia's foreign policy, particularly in the aftermath of the eruption of the Cambodia-Thailand border dispute from 2008 to 2011. Second, whenever necessary and available, Cambodian leaders have sought support and assistance from external power(s) to address their geopolitical predicament, as illustrated by the acceptance of the French protectorate in 1863. Thereafter, Cambodian leaders adopted the same approach. Prince Sihanouk unsuccessfully sought American military commitment shortly after gaining independence from France in 1953. Moreover, while the Lon Nol regime nourished its alliance with the US in the aftermath of the 1970 coup, the DK developed its tight alignment with China in the second half of the 1970s. Third, domestic political dynamics have always played an important role in shaping Cambodia's foreign policy. In fact, the individual political interest of leaders or regime survival has always been a driving force in the strategic calculus of Cambodian leaders.

Cambodia's geography and history

Cambodia's geography of being sandwiched between two historically predatory neighbours – Thailand and Vietnam – has been compelling in influencing the country's foreign policy. As discussed in Chapter 3, Cambodian leaders have been preoccupied with safeguarding Cambodia's territorial integrity and survival against these two neighbours since the collapse of the Angkor Empire in 1431. Contemporarily, Cambodian strategists still perceive security threats from Thailand and Vietnam. This perception has echoed within the Cambodian foreign policy community following the eruption of the Cambodia-Thailand border dispute in 2008.

As elaborated in Chapter 5, this border conflict has fundamentally reshaped Cambodia's strategic vision in three directions. First, the border clashes reminded Cambodian leaders that Cambodia remains bullied and intimidated by its stronger neighbours. Second, the conflict prompted Cambodian leaders to reassess ASEAN's role in promoting peace and security in the region and especially for Cambodia. In fact, Cambodia's confidence in ASEAN has declined due to the grouping's ineffective response to the Cambodia-Thailand border dispute. Last but not least, the aforementioned two security reconfigurations have shaped Cambodia's strategic direction away from ASEAN-based regionalism towards alignment with an external power, China. Moreover, Cambodia's uneasy relationship with Vietnam since 2012, mainly due to the bitter history between the two countries, resentment over ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia, and recent border disputes as well as their different positions on the South China Sea, has further pushed Cambodia towards China.

Cambodia's diplomatic tradition of seeking external powers' support

In order to overcome the aforementioned geopolitical predicament, Cambodian leaders have most of the time sought support and assistance from external power(s). This option depends primarily on the distribution of power among the major powers in Asia and the conviction that the external powers are willing and able to render credible support for Cambodia's security and survival. For instance, by the mid-nineteenth century, France became a predominant player in the Indochinese Peninsula. Therefore, Cambodia agreed to accept the French protectorate in 1863 in order to avoid its neighbours' suzerainty. Similarly, throughout the Cold War, as China and the US exerted significant influence in mainland Southeast Asia, Cambodia's alignment with these two great powers was adopted in different periods.

As China emerged as a regional and global power, the Cambodia-China bilateral relationship has experienced a remarkable transformation over the last two decades. Despite the mistrust that followed China's involvement in Cambodia's civil war and social strife, especially Beijing's support for the Khmer Rouge regime, bilateral ties have been noticeably consolidated and improved since 1997. Increasingly, Cambodian leaders seem to be convinced that the regional order in Asia will be Sino-centric in the near future. With such a worldview, they want to put Cambodia on the right side of the twenty-first-century history. Economically, China has played an increasingly important role in the socio-economic development of Cambodia as its main trading partner, the biggest source of FDI, and the top provider of development assistance and soft loans. Strategically, there has been a strong conviction that Cambodia's alignment can check the predatory behaviour of the Kingdom's bigger neighbours. Interestingly, the leaders in Phnom Penh do not see the rise of China as a threat but as a useful balancer against security threats from their immediate neighbours. Recently, Beijing has occasionally affirmed its commitment to protect Cambodia's security and sovereignty. In this regard, Phnom Penh believes that China's growing influence in Thailand would help tamper Bangkok's aggressive and bullying attitude towards Cambodia. Moreover, China's age-old policy since 1953 has been to maintain an independent Cambodia in order to prevent the domination of Vietnam in the Indochinese region. Thanks to the China-Vietnam territorial conflict over the South China Sea, Cambodian strategists strongly believe that Cambodia can rely on Beijing to address security threats from its neighbour in the east.

Cambodia's economic and political imperatives

Cambodia's history also strongly suggests that division and power struggles among various political forces within Cambodia were the primary reasons for the loss of territory to the powerful neighbours and interference from external great powers into the Kingdom's internal affairs. Moreover, being poor and less developed clearly affects Cambodia's status in the region and thus its relations with the

rest of the world. It is, therefore, crucial to understand Cambodia's economic and political imperatives and how they influence Cambodia's foreign policy direction. Post-conflict Cambodia reflects an economic imperative of aid-dependency. The country today remains one of the world's most aid-dependent states. Over the past two decades, it has received billions of dollars in development assistance from foreign governments, international agencies, and hundreds of NGOs spawned by the UN mission of the early 1990s. Apart from aid, Cambodia also receives hundreds of millions of dollars annually in low-interest rate loans from development banks and foreign governments. With such a level of aid-dependency, as discussed in Chapters 4 and 8, Cambodia's foreign policymakers might be preoccupied to ensure the sustainable flow of foreign assistance to the country for the socio-economic development of the country and the survival of the ruling elite. Inevitably, Cambodia's foreign policy has to compromise and accommodate the interests of donor countries.

Since the 2000s, China has played an increasingly important role in the socio-economic development of Cambodia. Recently, it has become Cambodia's primary trading partner, largest source of FDI, and top provider of development assistance and soft loans. Cambodia stands to reap enormous benefits from new Chinese initiatives such as the BRI and the AIIB. Politically, Cambodian officials often stress their appreciation of China's so-called 'no strings attached' aid and Chinese leaders' catchphrase of 'win-win cooperation' and 'mutual respect.' In contrast, assistance from the West comes with certain conditions, including respect for human rights as well as the promotion of democratic principles, good governance, and the rule of law. On top of that, many in the West share the view that Hun Sen has bolstered his political strength through the combination of unfair electoral victories, legal and extra-legal political manoeuvres, influence over the media and judiciary, intimidation, patronage, and cronyism. This view has been frequently raised by some foreign governments and NGOs in the West and is normally met by harsh responses from officials in Phnom Penh. As little trust in Western governments exists within the ruling CPP, China has become very appealing due to its unconditional assistance and economic engagement.

More importantly, Beijing has lately been crucially important for the regime survival in Phnom Penh for a number of reasons, which was discussed in more detail in Chapter 3. First, China's foreign aid and investment in Cambodia are indispensable for the promotion of the performance-based legitimacy of the ruling party. Second, China's 'no-strings attached' assistance and unconditional investment practice benefit the ruling elites handsomely, as the political and economic systems in Cambodia are closely intertwined in a form of neo-patrimonialism. Third, due to China's rapidly increasing political and economic clout, Beijing is currently not only a source of inspiration for the ruling CPP but also a shield that the Cambodian leaders can use to cushion pressure and criticism from the West when the ruling party opts for repressive means, whenever necessary, to promote its legitimacy and ensure its dominant political role.

Conceptualisation of Cambodia's strategic direction towards China

Due to China's rapidly increasing influence in Cambodia, as discussed in earlier chapters, one might argue that Phnom Penh has irreversibly fallen into Beijing's orbit. This perception does not capture a full picture of Phnom Penh's strategic approach. Conveniently, Cambodia's foreign policy towards China has been incompletely categorised partly due to the lack of comprehensive understanding of Cambodia's history and the misconception of the Kingdom's strategic direction. As discussed in the following sections, the conceptualisation of Cambodia's relations with China as bandwagoning is flawed both conceptually and empirically. The author of this book posits that since 1997, Phnom Penh has markedly strengthened its relations with Beijing from mistrust to a partnership and recently towards an increasingly tight alignment.

Bandwagoning with China?

There is very little writing on the Cambodia-China contemporary relationship from a strategic and security perspective. If any, the existing literature shares the perception that Cambodia has opted for bandwagoning with China. As detailed in Chapter 1, the author of this book posits that the bandwagoning behaviour of a small state towards a great power takes place if four variables are present: (1) a perception of threat towards the great power must exist within the foreign policy establishment of the small state in question; (2) the threat must be limited and manageable; (3) the small state tends to tolerate the great power's pressure to conform to the latter's interests; and (4) economic gains from the bandwagoning must be substantial and necessary for the small state to address its security challenges, domestically and externally. Based on this broad definition, Cambodia is not entirely bandwagoning with China because the first two variables are not present in Phnom Penh's relations with Beijing. Clearly, Cambodian leaders do not consider China a threat but as the most important strategic partner of Cambodia.

Moreover, although the last two variables exist in the Cambodia-China bilateral relations, it is not crystal clear that they constitute Phnom Penh's bandwagoning with Beijing. As seen in Chapters 2 and 7, due to China's increasing importance for Cambodia, Phnom Penh has increasingly accommodated China's interests, which include upholding the 'one-China policy' and protecting and promoting Chinese economic and cultural interests in Cambodia. Noticeably, in December 2009, Cambodia was criticised for deporting 20 Uighur asylum seekers, allegedly due to China's pressure. More noticeably, Cambodia has been strongly criticised for supporting China's position on the South China Sea at the expense of ASEAN unity. However, if accommodating China's interests is used as a yardstick, all countries in Southeast Asia are bandwagoning with China for the entire region is strongly upholding the 'one-China policy,' promoting China's economic and cultural interests. Countries such as Thailand, Malaysia, and Vietnam have reportedly

deported Uighur asylum seekers, even in larger number than what the Cambodian government did in 2009. Equally importantly, if Cambodia's alleged pro-China position on the South China Sea amounts to Phnom Penh's bandwagoning with China, one can also argue that countries like Thailand, Laos, Myanmar, and Brunei are adopting the same approach towards China for these countries' stance on the South China Sea is similar to that of Cambodia, as discussed in Chapter 5. In addition, if economic gain is the primary drive of foreign policy behaviour, it can be stated that all Southeast Asian countries are bandwagoning with China for no government in the region can ignore China's growing economic role in the world at large. In fact, all countries, including those that have strategic and territorial conflicts with China, such as Japan, Vietnam, and the Philippines, are trying to maximise their economic interests from Beijing's initiatives, particularly the BRI and AIIB.

Cambodia's increasingly tight alignment with China

The study of small state foreign policy focuses primarily on relations between small states and great powers and how small states address security risks and challenges in the relationships. It simplifies the complex security environment that small states like Cambodia are facing. In Asia, studies tend to focus on security challenges that the rise of China poses towards smaller states in the region. For Cambodia, China has not always posed imminent threats to its sovereignty and territorial integrity. Instead, Cambodia's greatest threats have always been its stronger and historically antagonistic neighbours – Thailand and Vietnam. Given the fact that small states cannot always withstand security challenges on their own, alignment with the external powers remains a strategic option. As discussed in Chapter 1, the existing literature has predominantly focused on tight alignments. Broadly, a tight alignment has several advantages for small states. It increases the power and capability of small states to deter and mitigate security threats via military assistance and economic support from great powers. However, small states might face risks deriving from their tight alignment with great powers, which include the erosion of foreign policy autonomy, over-dependence, possible abandonment, entrapment into great powers' conflicts, and the alienation of other powers and domestic forces.

With regard to Cambodia's relationship with China, it is widely perceived that Phnom Penh has gradually moved towards a tight alignment with Beijing for three reasons. First, the level of foreign policy coordination between Cambodia and China has been increasingly elevated since the late 2000s through regular foreign policy consultations under both government-to-government frameworks and CPP-CCP coordination mechanisms, as detailed in Chapter 8. Moreover, the military ties between the two countries have been promoted through China's increasing military assistance to Cambodia and the joint military exercises between the two countries, noticeably the annual Gold Dragon – the largest military exercises in Cambodia. Second, it is perceived that Cambodia's foreign policy flexibility against China's pressure has been continuously diminished. The outsiders have

increasingly viewed that China's influence in Cambodia is too prevalent to the extent that Phnom Penh cannot defy Beijing's pressure. Phnom Penh has increasingly accommodated Beijing's interests, as illustrated by Cambodia's commitment to the 'one-China policy' and to the promotion of Chinese interests in the Kingdom. Phnom Penh has also been seen as a key protector of China's interests in the region, noticeably in the South China Sea, and a strong supporter of all Chinese regional initiatives, including the Belt and Road and the New Asian Security Concept. Furthermore, it has been observed that Phnom Penh has extended its support for all Beijing-proposed candidates for key positions at international organisations. Although mutual support at the international arena is normal in state-to-state diplomacy, Phnom Penh's support without any reservations for China's interests has attracted special attention. Even worse, as the influx of China's 'easy money' continues to flow in Cambodia, the Kingdom has become a strategic asset of Beijing in Southeast Asia. One of the risks is a possibility that Chinese-funded commercial port in Cambodia would be used as China's quasi-military base in the long run. As discussed in Chapter 8, this perception is growing among Cambodian scholars and Vietnamese strategists. Although these allegations are subjective to falsification, Phnom Penh has not effectively convinced the rest of the world so far.

Third, Cambodia's foreign policy towards China, ASEAN, and other great powers has been excessively unbalanced, in favour of Beijing. As already discussed in Chapter 5, Cambodia's image in ASEAN has been damaged following the 'Phnom Penh Fiasco' – divisions among ASEAN Foreign Ministers on the South China Sea during their meeting in Phnom Penh in July 2012 – which led to a failure to issue the ASEAN joint communiqué. This incident has been used to build a narrative that Cambodia is a spoiled member of ASEAN or a proxy of China in Southeast Asia. The 'Phnom Penh Fiasco' took place partly due to the geopolitical complexities of the region in 2012, including the leadership transition in Beijing, the US presidential election, and the assertiveness of some ASEAN claimant states following the declaration of the American pivot to Asia. It was also due to the failure of Cambodia's diplomacy. Phnom Penh has been too straightforward to express its position on the South China Sea, which is widely considered as pro-Chinese.

More noticeably, Phnom Penh has also gone too far in its anti-Western rhetoric, especially against the US. While Phnom Penh has cancelled joint military exercises with the US and Australia, separately in early 2017, Cambodia continues to host a series of joint military exercises with China, noticeably the Golden Dragon humanitarian aid and disaster relief exercises. These moves have been interpreted as evidence of Cambodia's increasing alignment with China. As a small country dependent on external markets and assistance, Cambodia has to strengthen its ties with all major powers, including the US. Economically, the US is the largest foreign market for Cambodian goods, mostly apparel, which account for about half of the country's garment exports – from an industry that employs approximately 700,000 workers in the Kingdom. Politically, Phnom Penh's deteriorating ties with Washington will generate increasing pressure from not only the US but also its allies, such as Japan, Australia, and the EU, on Cambodia, as illustrated

by the West's recently coordinated political pressures following the dissolution of the CNRP.

Risks and challenges from Cambodia's increasingly tight alignment with China

The author of this book finds that there are three primary risks and challenges for Phnom Penh arising from its increasingly tight alignment with China. First, there has been growing public resentment over China's political and economic clout in Cambodia. Within the public debate, many have pointed out that there are correlations between China's growing influence in Cambodia and the regression of democracy, depletion of natural resources, and the erosion of foreign policy autonomy in the Kingdom. Second, there are certain risks and vulnerabilities from Cambodia's increasing dependence on a single great power, like China. These include possible abandonment, entrapment into the great powers' conflicts, and the alienation of other powers and domestic forces. Third, despite limited strategic options, there is a strong desire in Phnom Penh for the diversification of Cambodia's foreign policy, especially with other major powers, in order to create room for strategic manoeuvre. Cambodian leaders have been mindful of Cambodia's tragic past and have strived to avoid the repetition of their country's strategic mistakes, which turned the Kingdom into a victim of the realpolitik of the great powers during the Cold War. Therefore, the challenge for Cambodian strategists is to fine-tune the best strategic option to enable the Kingdom to survive and prosper.

Growing public resentment over Cambodia's alignment with China

As discussed in Chapter 8, there is growing resentment over China's economic and political prevalence in Cambodia. First, it is argued that China's economic engagement and political support for Phnom Penh has been a driver of the regression of democracy and the rule of law in Cambodia. The increase in China's 'no-strings attached' largesse has weakened Western influence in Cambodia over the promotion of democratic values in the Kingdom. Moreover, some Cambodian scholars argue that China's easy money might worsen corruption and the rule of law in Cambodia. More importantly, Cambodian leaders have recently looked up to China not only as a development model but also for governance guidance. China's economic engagement and political support has increasingly made Phnom Penh confident that the cost of the anti-democratic discourse is not too high.

Second, it is argued that China's economic engagement in Cambodia lacks social inclusiveness and environmental protection. The social costs related to land grabbing, the lack of proper resettlement and compensation mechanisms, and environmental degradation have been increased from Chinese projects in Cambodia. Culturally, many have expressed frustration over the rapid influx of the Chinese in Cambodia, noticeably in the coastal city of Sihanoukville. There is a concern that the city might soon become 'Little China' or 'New Macau.' Chinese

investors and tourists have created negative impressions in the coastal city. The local people have been frustrated by their smoking and gambling habits, careless and rude driving, and arrogance. Economically, it is argued that the locals have benefited less from the flood of Chinese tourists and investors as the Chinese have their own tourism operators and recruit their own people to run the chain of operations. On top of that, negative headlines have been reported about crimes related to money laundering, illegal casino operation, human trafficking, kidnapping, and cybercrimes, mostly committed by the Chinese in this coastal city.

Third, Phnom Penh's overdependence on China risks Cambodia's sovereignty and independence as China's economic clout can be translated into political influence to the extent that Phnom Penh has to compromise its declared foreign policy of neutrality and non-alignment. It is crucial to understand Cambodia's foreign policy through the prism of its historical memories of the past colonisation and foreign interventions. Those memories have shaped Cambodia's fundamental principles in the post-UNTAC era, which emphasise neutrality and non-alignment, non-interference into the internal affairs of other states, and non-participation in any military alliance or military pact, as clearly stipulated in Article 53 of the Cambodian Constitution.

The ruling CPP has to take into serious consideration those resentments. Despite the dissolution of the main opposition CNRP, Cambodia's foreign policymaking process has been diffuse, as it has accommodated the increasingly important role of various actors, such as NGOs and civil society organisations, think tanks, and the public as a whole. There are about 3,500 registered NGOs in Cambodia, even though not all of them are currently active. Few of them, along with think tanks, academic researchers, and activists of all sorts have been vocal and critical of domestic political and socio-economic domains as well as foreign policy issues, including China's growing influence in Cambodia. Noticeably, demographic change has been taking place in Cambodia in favour of political polarisation. Around 70 per cent of the population is under the age of 35. Young voters have been active in political life, as seen in the last elections in 2013 and 2017. Their voice has been echoed by information and communication technology. The number of phone subscribers and Internet users reached 20 million and 3.8 million respectively in 2013. By and large, this young, dynamic generation has been inspired by Western values. They have also advocated Cambodia's foreign policy diversification. On social network platforms and at public forums, they have expressed their concern over Cambodia's overdependence on China and a risk that Cambodia would lose its foreign policy autonomy.

Potential risks from Cambodia's increasingly tight alignment with China

Cambodia's increasingly tight alignment with China has alienated other major powers, especially the US. Phnom Penh's deteriorating ties with Washington has already generated increasing pressure from not only the US but also its allies, such as Japan, Australia, and the EU, on Cambodia. As far as security is concerned,

Cambodia's history suggests that aligning with a foreign power might invite intervention from other great powers into Cambodia's politics. Given the concern that Cambodia might further fall into China's orbit as well as Washington's desire to turn Cambodia into a democratic model for the Mekong region, Phnom Penh's increasingly tight alignment with China might run the risk of American intervention in the Kingdom.

Moreover, there has been growing frustration and anger among ASEAN members over Phnom Penh's perceived support for China's positions and interests in the region. Phnom Penh has been seen as China's proxy in ASEAN. As discussed in Chapter 5, some Singaporean diplomats even urged that Cambodia should be ejected from the regional grouping. Worse still, there is a growing perception among strategists in Hanoi that China might use its influence in Cambodia to contain the Vietnamese influence in mainland Southeast Asia. Hanoi's red line is China's creation of a 'quasi-military base' in Cambodia, presumably in Koh Kong or Ream. It is believed that if Phnom Penh crosses the red line, there will be serious consequences, as discussed in Chapter 8.

Cambodia's foreign policy dilemmas

In all periods in Cambodia's history, there have been strategic choices and dilemmas for Cambodian leaders. The twenty-first century has witnessed China's rise to become a global power that has also profoundly transformed the geopolitical landscape in Asia and beyond. In response, other major powers in Asia and the Indo-Pacific, including the US, Japan, Russia, and India, have tried to exert their influence on the changing regional balance of power. As a result, strategic misalignment and even competition among the major powers have emerged. In this context, although China plays a crucially important role in Cambodia's security and development, Cambodia also attaches importance to other powers, particularly Japan. This can be seen in the upgrading of the Cambodia-Japan bilateral ties into a strategic partnership in December 2013.

Cambodia has also attempted to diversify its relations with other major powers, noticeably, France and Russia, as illustrated by frequent visits by Cambodian leaders to the two countries. Phnom Penh's relations with France and Russia are based on long traditional friendship and strong bonds of personal ties as well as the historical role of these two powers in Cambodia. More interestingly, the US has been an indispensable force for regional peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region. It has been placed high in the strategic calculus of most countries in the region. Some Cambodian scholars have been advocating that Phnom Penh adopt a balanced foreign policy towards China and the US, and some even suggest that Cambodia should develop strategic cooperation with the US. Previously, Prime Minister Hun Sen also desired to strengthen Cambodia's relations with the US. On a few occasions, he spoke out of frustration that "Why it is so difficult to be a friend of the US?"

However, a balanced approach towards Beijing and Washington is inconceivable for Cambodia, at least for the near future, as there remains a huge gap in

the Cambodia-US relations. This gap is the result of a strategic misalignment between the two nations. To foreign policymakers in Phnom Penh, Cambodia has never been in American strategic interest in Asia as the White House has always preferred Thailand and Vietnam. Moreover, suspicion within the Cambodian leadership towards Washington remains strong due to the US's involvement in Cambodia's civil war from 1970 to 1991 and a belief in Phnom Penh that the US has been engaged in a "regime change" campaign in Cambodia since 1993, through Washington's support for Cambodian opposition parties and the anti-CPP NGOs and media.

Lastly, although Phnom Penh's confidence in ASEAN has diminished due to its ineffective response to the Cambodia-Thailand border dispute, the regional grouping remains relevant in Cambodia's foreign policy. In fact, countries in the region, especially small states like Cambodia, have benefited tremendously from the dividends of relative peace and prosperity that ASEAN has generated. There remains a conviction in Phnom Penh that regional institutions, such as ASEAN, can be of importance in addressing potential threats by the great powers, not by traditional military means, but by the institutionalisation of norms and rules that collectively constrain the behaviour of the threatening powers. In this context, the South China Sea dispute constitutes today's most difficult foreign policy dilemma, because China and ASEAN are almost equally important to Cambodia's security and development. If Cambodia joins ASEAN, especially the ASEAN claimants, it may face punishment from Beijing. If Cambodia fails to join ASEAN and its claimants, the regional grouping's relevance and its reputation in the region may be seriously damaged. These are hard choices that the rise of China and the evolving geopolitics of Asia present to Cambodia's foreign policy establishment. Cambodia might risk being once again a victim of the realpolitik of the great powers, if a strategic mistake is made.

Way forwards for Cambodia's diplomacy: a loose alignment with China

All things considered, China is the most important partner, but must not be the only one, for Cambodia. Undeniably, China is in a good position to provide enormous economic benefits for Cambodia and, to some extent, address the security need of the Kingdom. However, it is also obvious that the Cambodia-China bilateral ties are asymmetric between a small state and a great power in which the smaller side will, to a certain extent, experience strategic risks and vulnerabilities. In this respect, the author of this book proposes that, for the short run, Cambodia must catch the 'big dragon' of China in the form of loose alignment. Whether the loose alignment will be established will depend on (1) foreign policy behaviour of Thailand and Vietnam, and Cambodia's security perception towards these two regional powers; (2) Cambodia's expectations of ASEAN; (3) China's foreign policy approach towards Cambodia; and (4) political developments, including leadership change, in Cambodia. The last factor seems to be less compelling in shaping Cambodia's future foreign policy. Even for the pro-Western main

opposition leader Sam Rainsy, China is and will be the most important strategic partner due to his security fear of Cambodia's neighbours, especially Vietnam. Meanwhile, Cambodia must be relevant to and active in promoting the ASEAN regionalism for the very reason that ASEAN gives the Kingdom an opportunity to influence the rules of the game in the region and to hedge against risks and uncertainties. Equally importantly, Cambodia must create a favourable environment to consolidate its relations with other major powers in Asia and beyond. In the long run, Cambodia should adopt an omnidirectional foreign policy and play a key role in promoting a rules-based regional order. To this end, Cambodia's diplomacy needs to be strengthened through the promotion of institutional reforms and the recruitment of the best and most brilliant to the Foreign Service.

It is easier said than done. In fact, it is difficult for Cambodia to maximise benefits from its close relations with China, without negatively affecting its role in the ASEAN regionalism, and the building of a rules-based regional order in the Asia-Pacific region as well as its attempt to diversify Cambodia's relations with other major powers. This difficult task clearly emerged when Cambodia was assuming the ASEAN Chairmanship in 2012. In this regard, this book's conceptualisation of loose alignment can serve as foundation for Cambodia's foreign policy. First and foremost, Cambodia needs to continue the three "No-policies": (1) No formal defence treaty or widely acknowledged informal pact; (2) No permanent or semi-permanent basing rights; and (3) No joint combat operation or significant alliance bureaucracy. It seems less difficult to uphold these policies, for Article 53 of the Cambodian Constitution gives Cambodian leaders a shield against foreign powers' pressure, including that of China. The implementation of these 'No-policies' will help Phnom Penh to loosen Cambodia's alignment with China in order to broaden its strategic manoeuvrability and at the same time proclaim its political commitment to the Kingdom's neutrality with flexibility.

Second, in an uncertain world, regional cooperation and integration, like ASEAN, are strategically imperative for small states like Cambodia. Therefore, ASEAN must continue to be a priority for Cambodia's foreign policy. Theoretically, small states might reduce their vulnerability by binding together to increase their relevance and usefulness in shaping regional and international order. In addition to economic opportunities, regionalism provides three security roles: conflict prevention, conflict containment, and conflict termination. Although ASEAN's conflict resolution system may be rudimentary, its preventive diplomacy and norms related to the non-use of force and respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity can help prevent the escalation of regional conflicts. Moreover, regional institutions, such as ASEAN, can be of importance in institutional balancing. It is a strategy by which states attempt to address potential threats not by traditional military means but by the institutionalisation of norms and rules to either socialise a target state with the norms and rules or impose collective pressure and thus constrain the behaviour of the threatening state. The bottom line for small states like Cambodia is that promoting a rules-based regional order is imperative so that all states, regardless of their size, approach international affairs with similar assumptions. In this regard, a strong, cohesive ASEAN is fundamental for a rules-based

regional order as well as for Cambodia's future autonomy and prosperity, although this regional grouping has occasionally been ineffective in meeting the security and economic needs of its members, especially the small and weak ones.

As discussed earlier, Cambodia's role in ASEAN has been damaged by Phnom Penh's position on the South China Sea. There is, hence, an urgent need for Phnom Penh to address this issue. Cambodia must begin a diplomatic campaign to create an image as an independent and constructive player in the region, rather than a 'proxy' or 'puppet' of China. To this end, Cambodia's Foreign Ministry needs to engage in an extensive public diplomacy by working closely with national and regional think thanks as well as the media in order to provide clearer Cambodian perspectives on ASEAN and other important regional issues. Cambodia should seek and work with like-minded ASEAN friends in order to contribute to the ASEAN consensus on the South China Sea. By so doing, Cambodia can prevent some ASEAN members from hijacking ASEAN for their individual claim in the disputed region and hence maintain the ASEAN unity. It can also contribute to the promotion of ASEAN-China relations as well as regional peace and stability without the risk of being seen as an ASEAN spoiler.

Third, small states also rely on their expanded diplomatic horizon, especially with major powers, to ensure their relevance. However, it is crucially important to note that having close relationships with many major powers at the same time does not guarantee their unwavering commitment to assist the threatened small state in question if those major powers do not have an interest in so doing. Therefore, Cambodia needs to prioritise its alignment with the great powers. By and large, Cambodia's alignment preferences are influenced by its geographic proximity, threat assessment across issue areas and historical experiences, and the distribution of power in the region, as well as the political, economic, and diplomatic weight of targeted major powers. Cambodia's choices are also dependent on the great powers' commitment to address the security concerns of the Kingdom. China is now the most important partner of Cambodia. However, other major powers, including Japan, France, and Russia, as well as middle powers, such as South Korea and Australia, are crucially important for Cambodia to broaden its strategic space. More importantly, strengthening Cambodia's ties with these major powers does not seriously affect the Kingdom's close relations with its most important partner – China.

Fourth, a loose alignment with China would allow Cambodian strategists to address the country's old-age security puzzle with its neighbours – Thailand and Vietnam. On the one hand, these two regional powers have always been constant security threats to Cambodia's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Therefore, Cambodian foreign policymakers must be always on full alert about these potential threats and risks, and cannot take their country's own security and survival for granted. On the other hand, Cambodia's history provides a value lesson, as discussed in Chapter 2, that Cambodia's hostile policy towards the Thai and the Vietnamese encouraged the two neighbours to interfere into the Kingdom to protect their interests. For instance, Ang Chan II's alignment with the Vietnamese in the early 1800s led not only to the Vietnamisation of the Khmer but also to Thai military adventures, which were designed to re-exert Thai influence in Cambodia.

As a result, Cambodia became a battleground between the two regional powers, which ended with a peace settlement in 1846 turning Cambodia into a tributary state of both Thai and Vietnamese patrons. Another example from the recent past is the Lon Nol regime's anti-Vietnamese policy in the early 1970s, which resulted in the deeper infiltration by the Viet Cong into Cambodian territory. Similarly, Pol Pot's hostility towards Hanoi in the late 1970s invited the Vietnamese invasion in 1978 and was followed by Vietnam's occupation of Cambodia till 1989. Currently, due to a fear that China might use Cambodia as a 'quasi-military base,' the potential risk of Vietnam's interference into domestic politics is real and prevalent.

In this context, a loose alignment with China can solve this security puzzle for it serves as a soft balancing strategy against these two powerful neighbours. As analysed earlier, Phnom Penh's close ties with Beijing would ensure China's financial and military assistance that are crucial for Cambodia's development and defence capacity, but not for fighting wars against its neighbours but for deterrence purposes. Cambodia's strengthened ties with China can temper the potential aggressive behaviour of both Thailand and Vietnam. Meanwhile, by constraining Cambodia's relations with China in a form of loose alignment, Phnom Penh can circumvent any misperception that might exist among foreign policymakers in Bangkok and especially Hanoi about possible security threats as a result of Cambodia's increasing close relations China. This would allow Cambodia to promote its relations, particularly economic and cultural ties, with Thailand and Vietnam. As people say, "we can change friends, but not our neighbours," and therefore Cambodia has no other choice than to live and co-exist peacefully with these two historically antagonistic neighbouring countries. However, for the security and survival of this small state, Cambodian strategists can only hope for the best, but must always be prepared for the worst.

Fifth, IR are not a function of goodwill, friendship, or personal affection but a country's relevance to the region and beyond – economically, diplomatically, and militarily – in order to guarantee its survival and prosperity. To be relevant to the region, Cambodia needs to prioritise socio-economic development. A political role and prestige at regional and international forums cannot be promoted without economic backup. Therefore, the debate on Cambodia's foreign policy should shift from what foreign assistance Cambodia should accept towards how to optimally use foreign support and assistance to promote its socio-economic development and to meet its security challenges. In addition, the Cambodian Foreign Ministry needs to further invest in the promotion of economic and cultural diplomacy in order to construct a new image of Cambodia, which is not merely about the killing fields and Angkor Wat.

Sixth, in the era of globalisation, the world is increasingly interconnected and interdependent. Challenges are more complex and multifaceted, which require comprehensive and timely responses. Cambodia's diplomacy needs to embrace an open and inclusive decision-making process, with consultation with think tanks and academics in order to produce a nuanced foreign policy with a long-term strategic vision. Cambodia's Foreign Ministry needs to further invest in its newly established think tank – the National Institute of Diplomacy and International

Relations (NIDIR). The institute should play a critical role in building up capacity and knowledge of Cambodia's foreign service and be a source of ideas of the country's diplomacy through research and training. NIDIR should also serve as a platform of socialisation between generations in order to narrow generational gaps and create an opportunity for knowledge sharing and learning where senior and experienced diplomats should share with young foreign-service officers their experiences and diplomatic skills as well as help their juniors to fulfil their personal and career goals.

Finally, people are at the heart of diplomacy and human resources are the key to a country's success. In this respect, in order to attract the best and the brightest to work in the public sector, salaries should be attractive so that they can realise their full capacity in performing their duties and responsibility. Moreover, the government needs to provide incentives, motivation and equal opportunity to officials to enable them to broaden their knowledge and skills as well as to obtain new ideas, approaches to sharpen their analysis and improve their public management skills. A new organisational culture, based on meritocracy, pragmatism and result-orientation, needs to be nurtured. A fair and objective evaluation of mechanisms, based on merit and qualifications, must be in place to assess foreign-service officers for their promotion and assignment.

Conclusion

The long history of Cambodia, especially after the collapse of the Khmer Empire in 1431, provides a comprehensive explanation of the country's foreign policy behaviour. First, Cambodia's geography of being situated between powerful and historically antagonistic neighbours has been a persistent compelling factor shaping the country's strategic direction. The collapse of the Khmer Empire immediately put Cambodia under intermittent Thai suzerainty. Even worse, as the Vietnamese intensify their southward movement with the absorption of the entire Kingdom of Champa in the late eighteenth century, Cambodia found itself surrounded by two predatory neighbours. The end result was that Cambodian territory continued to be swallowed by the Thai and the Vietnamese, and their dominant influence over the Khmer was maintained and promoted until the arrival of the French in 1863. Second, seeking support and assistance from external powers against immediate neighbours had been the underlying diplomatic tradition of Khmer strategists. It is widely agreed that without the arrival of the French in Indochina, Cambodia as a nation-state would have completely disappeared from the world map. Consequently, Sihanouk's proclaimed policy of neutrality after Cambodia obtained its independence in 1953 was a delicate balancing act attempting to use the opposing powers in the Cold War, especially China and the US, to safeguard his country's independence and territorial integrity from neighbouring countries. However, as Sihanouk saw the declining influence of the US and thus changing balance of power in Indochina in favour of Hanoi, he established an alignment with China. Following the 1970 coup that overthrew Sihanouk, two different regimes, the KR (1970–1975) and the DK (1975–1979), opted for the establishment of alliances with the US and China, respectively, with the hope of ensuring the survival of their regimes and neutralising the threats from Cambodia's neighbours.

In the twenty-first century, the rise of China has altered Phnom Penh's world-view of which regional order in Asia will be Sino-centric. In this context, China has emerged as Cambodia's most important strategic partner. The Cambodia-China relationship experienced a remarkable transformation following Hun Sen's takeover of power in military violence in Phnom Penh in July 1997. Having said that, Phnom Penh was cautious in associating with Beijing due to suspicion and fear as a result of China's past involvements in Cambodia. Cambodian leaders were also concerned that their close relations with China would alienate Hanoi,

ASEAN, and Western donor countries, which remained crucial for Cambodia's security and economic development. Therefore, throughout the course of 1997–2008, Hun Sen and his ruling CPP maintained a delicate balancing foreign policy in the form of a hedging strategy towards China, Vietnam, and key Western donors, including Japan as well as ASEAN.

Cambodia's strategic direction evolved towards an alignment with China in the late 2000s. This shift was primarily driven by Phnom Penh's perception of growing security threats from its historically antagonistic neighbours – Thailand and Vietnam. The eruption of the Cambodia-Thailand border conflict from 2008 to 2011 reminded Cambodian leaders that their more powerful neighbour(s) remained a threat to Cambodia's security and territorial integrity. The conflict also further exacerbated the already negative sentiment of the Cambodian population towards their neighbours to the west. Equally importantly, Cambodia's ties with its neighbour to the east, Vietnam, have also been increasingly problematic due to historical antagonism, border disputes, and illegal Vietnamese migration in Cambodia. Noticeably, Cambodia's alleged support for China's position on the South China Sea at the expense of Vietnam's claim has also been a source of Phnom Penh-Hanoi tense relations, particularly in the aftermath of the failure of the ASEAN Foreign Ministers to issue a joint communiqué during their meeting in Phnom Penh in July 2012.

The Cambodia-Thailand border dispute also prompted Cambodian leaders to reassess ASEAN's role for their country's security. Initially, Cambodian foreign policymakers had been convinced that ASEAN would be a crucial regional platform in which Cambodia can safeguard and promote its strategic, political, and economic interests. Therefore, since becoming a member of ASEAN on 30 April 1999, the regional grouping has been always considered to be at the core of Cambodia's foreign policy. However, Phnom Penh's confidence in ASEAN has diminished after the growing perception among Cambodian foreign policymakers that the regional grouping has not met Cambodia's security needs, particularly in the aftermath of the Cambodia-Thailand border dispute. Having said that, Cambodia's foreign policy towards ASEAN is far more complicated. In fact, ASEAN remains crucial in Cambodia's foreign policy. Therefore, ASEAN regionalism and an alignment with China continue to be Cambodia's foreign policy hard choices.

It is increasingly obvious that while Chinese largesse has strongly influenced Cambodia's alignment with China, the underlying factor rests on the fact that Beijing has been increasingly seen as an important guarantor of Cambodia's sovereignty and territorial integrity. It seems that Cambodia has, for the time being, very limited strategic manoeuvrability. Due to ASEAN's ineffectiveness on the security front, Cambodian leaders have attempted to shift the country's foreign policy direction towards alignments with the great powers. Again, Cambodia's alignment options are also limited. Besides China, only Japan can potentially provide Cambodia with these benefits. As a result, the Cambodia-Japan strategic partnership was established in December 2013. However, Phnom Penh's strategic configuration is a challenging task because its alignments with China and Japan have different values. The strategic and political roles of China for Cambodia

outweigh that of Japan. More interestingly, Cambodia-US relations have been problematic and their strategic cooperation is inconceivable at least in the near future for a number of reasons. Phnom Penh is of the view that Cambodia has never been an American strategic interest in Asia and that the US has always prioritised its ties with Thailand and Vietnam over Cambodia. On top of that, Cambodian leaders are increasingly convinced that the American leadership in the region has been and will continue to decline in favour of China. Equally importantly, suspicion and sometimes misperception among the leadership in Phnom Penh towards Washington remain strong due to historical memories of American military campaigns in Indochina, perceived US interference in Cambodia's politics, and alleged American double standards vis-à-vis the promotion of the American values. The Cambodian government has also promoted its ties with France and Russia. Yet Cambodian foreign policymakers perceive that these two major powers can play only a symbolic role as Cambodia's former patrons for the important reason that they lack both the willingness and the capacity to help the Kingdom to meet its security and economic needs.

As a result, Cambodia's alignment with China has been consolidated into what is now categorised as an increasingly tight alignment. The ruling CPP can be expected to follow the current trajectory of pursuing close relations with China while, whenever possible, strengthening relations with other regional and global powers so long as they allow Cambodia to benefit from these relations and enable the ruling party to maintain the political status quo. However, Cambodia's increasingly tight alignment with China would bring about risks and challenges for this small state. The potential risks and challenges include (1) the deterioration of democratic values and good governance; (2) possible financial bondage to China and thus erosion of its foreign policy autonomy; (3) entrapment into China-US competition; and (4) alienation of its neighbouring countries, most noticeably Vietnam. In order to minimise those risks and at the same time draw upon China's support and assistance, Cambodia should adopt a loose alignment with this great power. In fact, loose alignment is the most cost-effective strategy for small states that need support and assistance from external powers. It enables small states to balance risks and rewards from security cooperation and keep options open for foreign policy diversification and multilateral diplomacy.

The study of Cambodia's foreign policy towards China might have implications for other small states in the developing world. As far as foreign policy analysis is concerned, the case of Cambodia's foreign policy suggests three important explanatory factors. First, although structural changes at the system level are important factors influencing the foreign policy behaviour of this small state, they seem to be secondary to geopolitical developments at the sub-regional level. Most of the time, small state foreign policy is shaped not by structural changes at the system level but by the security environment in the immediate region. In fact, in many cases, the greatest security threats to small states, including Cambodia, Laos, Brunei, and Singapore, derive from their immediate neighbours. To address security challenges, small states tend to seek support from external powers. Small states' strategic options depend primarily on the distribution of power within their

region, rather than the balance of power at the system level. As discussed earlier, the fundamental shift of Cambodia's foreign policy took place in the late 2000s, as Phnom Penh adopted an alignment with Beijing. The adoption of this approach was driven by revived threats from Cambodia's historically predatory neighbours. Cambodia's alignment with China is also a reflection of the changing distribution of power in Asia in favour of China and Phnom Penh's conviction that the future of the region would be Sino-centric.

Second, domestic variables, such as democratisation and economic liberalisation, have been used to explain the foreign policy behaviour of small states. However, the security and survival of the regime is a paramount factor in shaping small state foreign policy. By and large, concern over regime survivability, more often than not, shapes the foreign policy of many small states in the developing world, partly because of the absence of fully democratic institutions that prompts leaders in those countries to be preoccupied with foreign interference into their country's domestic affairs. It is also due to the low level of development that motivates ruling elites to secure foreign aid, investment, and trade. On top of that, regime security might be a legitimate concern of leaders in small states due to the simple reason that smallness tends to invite interference and exploitation from foreign powers. Empirically, most, if not all, small states have been victims of foreign interference, through colonisation, military invasion, and political intervention. Therefore, leaders of small states do not talk of sovereignty and territorial integrity lightly. In fact, they have never taken for granted their country's sovereignty and survival as there is a small margin of error for small states in international politics.

Third, the variables influencing small state foreign policy at the individual level might be different from case to case. The options that small states select reflect the personal judgement of individual leaders, which is influenced by their personal experience, personality, ego, and ambition, as well as their worldview. Having said that, variables at the individual level seem less influential in shaping the strategic direction of small states because they are mainly confined by structural constraints at the sub-regional level, as mentioned earlier. It might be an exaggeration to say that small states are merely pawns on the geopolitical chessboard whose movements are mainly determined by bigger players. But this statement holds some truth. The study of Cambodia's foreign policy suggests that no matter who the leader of Cambodia is, he or she would have to address the Kingdom's geopolitical predicament of being pressed by two historically antagonistic neighbours – Thailand and Vietnam. As long as border disputes between Cambodia and these two neighbours remain unresolved and strategic mistrust unanswered, Cambodian foreign policymakers would continue to be influenced by the country's diplomatic tradition of seeking external powers to counterbalance against these two. Although the level and type of Cambodia's security cooperation with great powers might vary based on the judgement of different individual leaders, the Kingdom's fundamental strategic direction would remain the same.

Conceptually, the study of Cambodia's strategic direction towards China provides a new perspective on a broader picture of Southeast Asia's response to the

rise of China. The existing literature gives an impression that countries in the region have, at different degrees, selected a hedging strategy to deal with the uncertain security landscape of the Asia-Pacific region as the result of the rise of China. However, Southeast Asia is a diverse region in which individual countries' historical experiences and threat perceptions differ quite markedly. Generally, the worldviews of strategists in maritime Southeast Asian states are different from those of their continental Southeast Asian counterparts. Within continental Southeast Asia, geographical location, threat assessment across issue areas, and historical experiences also differ significantly. As a result, their responses to the rise of China and the changing regional security landscape are far from uniform. For Cambodia – along with another small state in the region, Laos – hedging is not an option at least for the time being because it does not reflect Cambodia's strategic choice. Hedging is a way of avoiding making a clear choice. However, Phnom Penh's foreign policy choice seems to be clear that China is its most important strategic partner, even though it is not the only friend. This is because Cambodia's foreign policy options remain limited due to the imbalance of its relations between China and the US. Other major powers – Japan, France, and Russia – and regional institutions, like ASEAN, are important but not yet reliable in the eyes of Cambodian strategists when it comes to ensuring the state security of Cambodia as well as the regime survival in the Kingdom.

Normatively, the author of this book argues against tight alignment and in favour of loose alignment. Loose alignment is an autonomy-preserving strategy for small states that need support and assistance from great powers to meet their security challenges. Security challenges remain looming for small states around the world partly because of the lack of resources to absorb and mitigate security threats by themselves. Moreover, smallness tends to invite foreign interference and intervention. As a result, there is a need for small states to align with great powers in order to address security challenges and ensure their survival. Once alignments are formed, however, small states run the risk of losing their foreign policy autonomy, alienating other states and domestic forces, and facing possible abandonment and entrapment into the conflict of great powers. More importantly, as international politics is characterised by uncertainty and unpredictability, preserving strategic flexibility and planning for future contingencies are important priorities for small states. To this end, loose alignment is the best possible strategy for them to balance between the risks and rewards from security cooperation and to keep options open for foreign policy diversification towards great powers. It also allows small states to take part in regionalism and multilateral diplomacy. In fact, loose alignment can reinforce efforts by small states to maintain flexibility and their constructive role in promoting regionalism and regional institutions. Regional multilateral forums may serve their interests, so small states have an added incentive not to alienate the key players in these forums by forging an alliance or tight alignment with external great powers. In addition, regional organisations, such as ASEAN, can help small states to address potential threats through the institutionalisation of norms and rules, known as 'institutional balancing.' Through this process, a small state

can socialise and constrain the behaviour of threatening states. In addition, engaging in regional and international organisations helps small states to draw on global regimes, international law, and norms in order to enhance their political influence and economic prosperity. Therefore, the failure to benefit from regional and international organisations is more a reflection of their overall foreign policy inactivity than the deterministic result of their smallness.

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