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Chronology

1863-1941

French colonial rule in Cambodia is relatively stable due to French patronage of the King and because popular challenges to authority are smothered. During the early part of the 20th century, the westernisation of Cambodian life intensifies and the French exercise a particularly strong control over Cambodian rulers until a less cooperative monarch, Norodom Sihanouk, accedes to the throne.

Sihanouk, independence and neutrality (1941-1970)

1941

Following the death of King Sisowath Monivong, his eighteen-year-old nephew, Norodom Sihanouk is installed as King by the French colonial authority.

1945

Japanese occupying force removes French colonial officials from their posts and urges Sihanouk to declare Cambodia's independence. The French regain control over Cambodia when World War II ends.

1946-47

The anti-Sihanouk Democrat Party wins Cambodia's first multi-party elections and control of the National Assembly. Real power remains in the hands of the French and the King.

1948-49

Sihanouk asserts increasing control over domestic politics and wins greater control from the French over military and foreign affairs.

1950-51

Fearing communist expansionism, the US begins to pour military aid into Southeast Asia. Pro-Sihanouk, right-wing parties begin to compete with the Democrat Party. The Cambodian communist party, forerunner of the Khmer Rouge is formed, supported by the Vietnamese communists.

1952-53

Sihanouk launches a bloodless coup against his government, with French support. Appointing himself Prime Minister, he promises full independence within three years. A concerted campaign begins to suppress the Democrats, radicalising many young Khmers. Cambodia gains independence in 1953.

1955

The revival of the Democrats leads Sihanouk to abdicate and form a political movement, Sangkum Reastr Niyum (People's Socialist Community), which captures all seats in the National Assembly. His ageing father, Suramarit, becomes King and chief of state. Sihanouk declares Cambodia neutral, but accepts US military and economic aid.

1958

Sangkum maintains dominance after National Assembly elections. Sihanouk's government survives several foreign-inspired attempts to overthrow it.

1960

King Suramarit dies and Sihanouk becomes chief of state again. His mother serves as monarch for ceremonial purposes.

1962-63

Sangkum again dominates National Assembly elections. Pol Pot becomes secretary of the communist party, which is still legal. Fearing a Sihanouk crackdown, Pol Pot and other leftist leaders take to the jungle. Relations cool with the US and Sihanouk stops accepting aid.

1965

The Vietnam War intensifies. Sihanouk continues to proclaim Cambodian neutrality, severing diplomatic relations with the US. Desperate to keep Cambodia out of the war, he allows the North Vietnamese to maintain bases in Cambodia. They in turn urge the anti-Sihanouk Khmer communists to delay launching their armed struggle.

1968-69

The communists (increasingly referred to as the Khmer Rouge by Sihanouk) officially launch their armed struggle and within two years control half the country. Sihanouk restores diplomatic ties with the US. President Nixon authorises secret bombing of eastern Cambodia to destroy North Vietnamese military bases and supply routes.

War and social upheaval (1970-87)

1970

While abroad, Sihanouk is deposed by his government which is unhappy with his foreign and economic policies. General Lon Nol remains

Prime Minister, declares Cambodia a republic and renews military ties with the US. Sihanouk seeks refuge in Beijing and considers an alliance with the communists. Lon Nol launches two disastrous attacks against the Vietnamese. The US and South Vietnam invade eastern Cambodia in pursuit of North Vietnamese forces.

1973

The US air force carpet-bombs large sections of eastern Cambodia, delaying an imminent Khmer Rouge victory and keeping the dying Lon Nol regime in power. The US Congress halts further bombing.

1975

Phnom Penh falls to the Khmer Rouge on 17 April. Democratic Kampuchea (DK) is founded and the population is ordered to evacuate all urban centres and form agricultural collectives. Intellectuals and other 'enemies of the revolution', including monks, are summarily executed. North and South Vietnam are re-unified after the fall of Saigon.

1976

A new Constitution abolishing private property and organised religion is created. Sihanouk returns from Beijing but is soon placed under house arrest in Phnom Penh by the DK leadership which remains concealed from the outside world.

1977

DK receives military aid from China. Internal purges of dissidents begin. A number of DK commanders, including Hun Sen, flee to Vietnam where they are groomed as a government in exile. Vietnam launches attacks into Cambodia following border disputes.

1978

Famine is widespread throughout Cambodia. Many people flee to Thailand. Over one million Cambodian's have by now died from

hunger, disease and execution. Pol Pot rejects talks with the Vietnamese. On Christmas Day Vietnam begins its offensive to 'liberate' the Cambodian people from the DK regime.

1979

Phnom Penh quickly falls. The entire DK leadership escapes and Sihanouk is flown to Beijing. Large numbers of Cambodians head for the Thai border. The Vietnamese-backed People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK), of socialist orientation, is established. The Vietnamese disregard a UN resolution calling for them to leave Cambodia and the Khmer Rouge keep Cambodia's UN seat. Former Prime Minister Son Sann creates an anti-PRK armed movement based on the Thai border which comes to be called the Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPLNF).

1980-81

The Khmer Rouge regroup in the north under Pol Pot. Some 100,000 Vietnamese troops remain in Cambodia to prop up the PRK. Under pressure from the Chinese and other foreign powers, Sihanouk creates a resistance front called FUNCINPEC. The international community isolates Cambodia economically and politically to punish Vietnam. Evidence begins to emerge of the huge scale of Khmer Rouge atrocities from 1975-79.

1982

Under pressure from the US and ASEAN, the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK) – a tripartite 'resistance' movement comprising the Khmer Rouge, FUNCINPEC and Son Sann's KPLNF – is formed in exile. Sihanouk becomes its President and his son, Prince Ranariddh, assumes leadership of FUNCINPEC. With western military support a guerrilla war is launched against the People's Republic of Kampuchea.

1983-86

The resistance factions are pushed back onto Thai territory by PRK and Vietnamese troops.

Military stalemate sets in. Completely isolated, Cambodia is among the world's poorest countries. A young Hun Sen is named Prime Minister of the PRK in 1986.

The struggle for peace (1987-1991)

1987

Sihanouk holds talks with Hun Sen in Paris marking the start of serious efforts to resolve Cambodia's conflict. The possibility of forming a coalition government between the PRK, FUNCINPEC and the KPLNF, excluding the Khmer Rouge, is rejected by the US and China.

1988

The four Cambodian factions meet face to face for the first time at the Jakarta Informal Meeting (JIM) hosted by Indonesia in July.

1989

A second meeting between the factions takes place in February. Faced with the loss of Soviet patronage, Vietnam begins withdrawing its troops from Cambodia. The PRK changes its name to the State of Cambodia (SoC) and tentatively embarks on some political and economic reforms. Nineteen countries, the UN and the four factions meet at the Paris Conference on Cambodia. The factions are not yet ready to make serious concessions for peace.

1990

The US government announces it will no longer permit the Khmer Rouge to hold Cambodia's UN seat. China reduces its aid to the Khmer Rouge. As pressure grows on the four Cambodian parties, they accept a framework for a political settlement proposed by the five permanent members of the Security Council. The Cambodian parties form the Supreme National Council (SNC) which is to be the unique legitimate body and source of authority in Cambodia throughout a transitional period.

1991

The factions declare their first ceasefire for 12 years in June. King Sihanouk joins the SNC and is elected as its President. At an August meeting the key obstacles to a political settlement are ironed out. The Paris agreements are signed by the four Khmer factions, 19 countries and the UN Secretary General on 23 October in Paris. Soon after, the UN Security Council authorises establishment of a peacekeeping mission to oversee implementation of the agreements.

Implementing the agreements (1991-93)

1991

November

Sihanouk returns to Cambodia for the first time since 1978. FUNCINPEC and the SoC announce a formal political alliance, designed to bolster their joint position in the elections, but it soon collapses. The first UN personnel arrive in Cambodia. Khieu Samphan, the Khmer Rouge representative to the SNC, is nearly lynched by an angry mob in Phnom Penh.

1992

March

Yasushi Akashi, the UN Secretary General's special representative for Cambodia arrives, marking the first day of UNTAC's deployment. The UN begins repatriating some 350,000 Cambodians from Thailand.

June

The cantonment, disarmament and demobilisation of the military factions begins. The Khmer Rouge refuses to participate. The UN rejects a Khieu Samphan proposal linking its regroupment and cantonment with the dismantling of the Phnom Penh government.

August-September

The electoral law is promulgated by Akashi in consultation with the SNC and registration of political parties begins. Khieu Samphan states

that sanctions of any sort against the Khmer Rouge would 'jeopardise the integrity' of the agreements. Voter registration begins.

November-December

The Khmer Rouge maintains it will not participate in elections until the 'neutral political environment' called for in the Paris agreements has been created. UNTAC effectively suspends the demobilisation process. The Khmer Rouge begins a concerted campaign to intimidate UNTAC as it completes its military deployment across Cambodia.

1993

January-March

Voter registration is completed. SoC political intimidation directed at members of FUNCINPEC and other opposition parties increases sharply. Akashi expresses dissatisfaction with the political environment. Some 100 ethnic Vietnamese are massacred by the Khmer Rouge in several attacks on villages.

April

The UN Security Council strongly condemns Khmer Rouge attacks resulting in five UNTAC deaths. Akashi denounces the SoC for obstructing implementation of the electoral law. The six-week electoral campaign begins. Widespread political violence by the SoC continues.

May

Voting takes place peacefully. Turnout is extremely high and the UN declares the elections free and fair. FUNCINPEC and the Buddhist Liberal Democratic Party (BLDP), the political movement of the KPLNF, agree to accept the results unconditionally, but the SoC reserves its final position.

June

Final election results are released. FUNCINPEC wins 45.2% of the vote, the SoC's Cambodia People's Party (CPP) – 38.7% and the BLDP 3.7%. Hun Sen rejects the results, threatening secession of several eastern provinces as well as violence. UNTAC and the international community stand by as Sihanouk convinces FUNC-

INPEC, the CPP and the BLDP to share power. A provisional government is formed while the new Constitution is drafted.

September

Sihanouk is reinstated as King and promulgates the new Constitution. Cambodia becomes a constitutional monarchy with the King as head of state. Prince Ranariddh and Hun Sen are appointed 'first' and 'second' Prime Ministers respectively of the Royal Government.

October-December

The new government launches a major offensives against the Khmer Rouge. By the end of the year UNTAC completes its withdrawal from Cambodia. FUNCINPEC ministers complain of CPP dominance in the government.

The peace unravels (1994-97)

1994

January-March

FUNCINPEC Finance Minister, Sam Rainsy, initiates anti-corruption reforms without support from the Prime Ministers. Khmer Rouge strongholds of Anlong Veng and Pailin are gained by the government but are soon lost again.

April-June

The Khmer Rouge almost captures Battambang city. Sihanouk's attempts at peace talks with the Khmer Rouge fail when it refuses a ceasefire. Tensions rise within FUNCINPEC as Rainsy and Foreign Minister Prince Sirivudh publicly voice differences with Ranariddh.

July

A coup attempt is alleged and the CPP plotters including Prince Chakrapong, Ranariddh's half-brother, are exiled. Hun Sen criticises as 'unconstitutional' Sihanouk's proposal to resume power if asked to do so by the government.

September-October

Rumours abound that Hun Sen is to be replaced by his deputy Sar Kheng. A crack-

down on government critics leaves one newspaper editor dead. Rainsy is removed as Finance Minister and Prince Sirivudh resigns as Foreign Minister out of solidarity. The CPP further asserts its dominance within the coalition. Renewed fighting with the Khmer Rouge leaves some 90,000 people internally displaced.

1995

January-February

Seven thousand Khmer Rouge soldiers defect to the government. FUNCINPEC officials openly complain about the CPP stranglehold over the sub-provincial administration.

March-April

Hun Sen and Ranariddh call on the UN to 'phase out' its human rights office in Cambodia. In Paris, Hun Sen warns international donors not to place political conditions on aid. Amnesty International publishes a stinging criticism of human rights violations in Cambodia.

May-June

Rainsy is expelled from FUNCINPEC and soon after loses his seat in the National Assembly without a formal vote being taken. The BLDP splits into two separate parties after tensions between party leader Son Sann and his deputy Ieng Mouly come to a head.

October

The CPP and FUNCINPEC agree a fairer distribution of power at district level. Ranariddh openly criticises CPP dominance of the judiciary.

November-December

Sam Rainsy forms the Khmer Nation Party (KNP), to the government's great displeasure. Prince Sirivudh is arrested on a trumped-up charge of plotting to assassinate Hun Sen and stripped of parliamentary immunity. Sihanouk negotiates exile for him in France.

1996

February

The Cambodian army advances on Khmer Rouge-controlled Pailin again. The Khmer Nation

Party splits into two after internal disputes.

March-April

At a FUNCINPEC party congress, Ranariddh lashes out at the CPP's continuing monopoly of power, signalling a deep split in the governing coalition. Logging deals signed by the government with foreign companies are widely criticised. Hun Sen strongly warns Ranariddh not to withdraw from the coalition.

May

Politically-motivated violence rises sharply. The IMF is unhappy that logging revenues are not reaching the Ministry of Finance and freezes its financial support.

August

As the Prime Ministers continue to bicker, rumours circulate that some FUNCINPEC members plan to defect to the CPP. Ranariddh urges unity in the party. Ieng Sary, the former number two in the Khmer Rouge, defects with thousands of his troops to the government side, though reaches an agreement allowing him to maintain effective control over his stronghold in Pailin.

September-October

Following a request from Hun Sen and Ranariddh, Ieng Sary is granted a controversial amnesty by the King which leaves open the possibility of future prosecution for crimes against humanity.

November

ASEAN announces Cambodia will be granted full membership in July 1997. Political tensions spark a military stand-off in Battambang between forces loyal to the two Prime Ministers.

1997

January-February

The National United Front (NUF) is established by FUNCINPEC, Sam Rainsy's KNP, Son Sann's BLDP and the Khmer Neutral Party. The CPP denounces its coalition partner's alliance with 'opposition' parties. Fighting breaks out in Battambang between rival factions of the national army loyal to the

two Prime Ministers. Frustrated with the political problems, the King threatens to abdicate.

March-April

Hun Sen suggests royals should be banned from politics. Hun Sen and Ranariddh try to make up in public, pledging to cooperate. Grenades are thrown at a public demonstration led by Sam Rainsy in front of the National Assembly, killing 16 people. Hun Sen denies orchestrating the attack. Two senior FUNCINPEC officials announce a split with Ranariddh, and form a second FUNCINPEC party.

May-June

Hun Sen accuses Ranariddh of warmongering after an arms cache is discovered. Ranariddh representatives negotiate with Khieu Samphan in a bid to win his defection and divide the Khmer Rouge. Ranariddh is denounced by Hun Sen and tensions between the two mount. Elite bodyguards of the two Prime Ministers clash violently in Phnom Penh. As splits widen within the Khmer Rouge, Son Sen, another key leader, is killed by Pol Pot.

July

Ranariddh flees to Bangkok as heavy fighting breaks out in Phnom Penh. Hun Sen says his military action against Ranariddh was to prevent a coup. Several hundred casualties are reported as forces loyal to the Prince are routed. Party members flee the country or go into hiding and some 40 military advisers to Ranariddh are executed. The international community denounces the coup mutedly and a few countries suspend aid. ASEAN postpones Cambodia's membership and sees its offer to mediate in the crisis rebuffed by Hun Sen. In western Cambodia, Pol Pot is denounced by his associates at a 'people's tribunal' and placed under house arrest. Ta Mok assumes control of the Khmer Rouge.

Managing the crisis (1997-98)

August-September

Ranariddh is stripped of parliamentary immunity. Hun Sen appoints Ung Huot, the FUNCINPEC Foreign Minister as 'first' Prime Minister claiming the coalition government is

still intact. Cambodia's UN seat is left vacant. A thousand-strong peace march is led through Phnom Penh by monks to calm the people. Forces loyal to Ranariddh regroup around O'Smach on the Thai border where fighting has forced some 50,000 civilians across the border.

October-December

Self-exiled FUNCINPEC parliamentarians begin to return home. Hun Sen claims that Ranariddh can return, but must stand trial for 'colluding with the Khmer Rouge' and 'illegally importing arms'. Sihanouk leaves for China when his mediation efforts are rebuffed. Sam Rainsy meets with Hun Sen in a bid to broker Ranariddh's return. The Law on Political Parties is adopted on 28 October and the National Assembly sets 26 July as the date for the 1998 elections. The Law on the Election of National Assembly Members is not passed until 19 December.

January-March

The international community backs a Japanese peace proposal linking Ranariddh's return with the holding of elections. The EU and Japan announce funding for the elections. Efforts to arrange a ceasefire between troops loyal to the two Prime Ministers fail. In line with the peace plan, Ranariddh is found guilty in two show trials before a military tribunal, is pardoned by his father, and returns to Phnom Penh. The Law on the Organisation and Functioning of the Constitutional Council is approved on 19 March.

April

The opposition parties, now in disarray, prepare for elections. The US announces US \$7 million in electoral assistance to be provided through local NGOs for voter education campaigns. The UN human rights office denounces some 100 politically-motivated killings since the July coup. Pol Pot dies in captivity from natural causes.

May

Foreign governments, NGOs, and the opposition parties express real concern that the elections will not be 'free and fair' given Hun Sen's complete dominance of the state and the electoral machinery. As thousands more Khmer Rouge defect, the movement is on the verge of

collapse. The long-awaited Supreme Council of Magistracy is established on 21 May.

June

The election campaign begins, marked by the political intimidation of opposition parties and openly anti-Vietnamese remarks by some politicians. Hun Sen keeps a low profile, portraying himself as the 'guardian of democracy'. Some of the opposition parties threaten to boycott the elections unless a more neutral environment is created.

July

The voting goes smoothly on 26 and 27 July, though the opposition parties quickly allege electoral fraud. International observers, led by the UN and the EU, tentatively declare the polls 'free and fair' some days following the vote. A range of independent observer groups disagree with this initial positive assessment.

August

Official electoral results give the CPP 41.4% of the vote, FUNCINPEC 31.7% and the KNP 14.3%. A controversial formula used to allocate seats gives Hun Sen a parliamentary majority. The Constitutional Council throws out most official complaints of fraud without addressing them. International pressure is placed on the opposition leaders to form a coalition government with Hun Sen. They resist.

September

Popular demonstrations at Phnom Penh's 'Democracy Square' calling for fraud allegations to be addressed are violently repressed. The King attempts and fails to broker a solution to the crisis. The new National Assembly is convened the same day as an alleged assassination attempt on Hun Sen. Prince Ranariddh, Sam Rainsy and other opposition politicians leave Cambodia fearing for their safety.

October

With many of the opposition deputies, and both Prince Ranariddh and Sam Rainsy still outside the country, Hun Sen is unable to achieve a quorum to convene the new National Assembly. Meanwhile, negotiations over the formation of a new government remain deadlocked ■