

U.S.-Cambodia Defense Relations: Defining New Possibilities

by Lewis M. Stern

Key Points

Cambodia's lax border controls, widespread corruption, extremely active arms trade, and surfeit of small arms remaining from the Third Indochina War have made Phnom Penh an attractive platform for transient interests, as well as a staging ground for numerous activities that challenge the safety and well-being of the region.

China has actively pursued security ties with Cambodia through modest assistance programs whose significance has been magnified by the lack of similar U.S. efforts, which were severely curtailed as a result of congressionally imposed restrictions in the aftermath of the 1997 coup.

U.S. interests in Southeast Asia would be well served by a stepped-up program of cooperation with Cambodia in areas such as counterterrorism, peacekeeping, counternarcotics, disaster response, and stability operations. U.S. early investment in Cambodia's future, beginning with support for the regional peace process, would provide a useful foundation for cooperation between the two countries that would have beneficial impact for Southeast Asia as a whole.

A Prospect of Partnership

In his speech to the International Institute for Strategic Studies annual Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore in late May 2009, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates laid

out a vision of U.S. policy toward the region. The vision relies on longstanding treaty allies in Southeast Asia—the Philippines, Thailand, and Australia—as “cornerstones of U.S. foreign policy.” However, that vision does not stop there: it is designed to build a “new comprehensive partnership” with Indonesia and Singapore, to increase cooperation with Malaysia and Vietnam, and “to forge new partnerships in places long disregarded. This includes our emerging dialogue with Cambodia, as well as developments with Laos.” The dialogue with Cambodia thus holds out the prospect of a new partnership with a “long disregarded” country.

The record of U.S. engagement with the Cambodian military in the years following the 1993 United Nations (UN)–supervised election suggests that Cambodian military officers were open to the idea of developing a bilateral relationship with their U.S. counterparts, relished the possibility of access to U.S. training and technology, welcomed opportunities to train in U.S. professional military educational institutions, and quickly learned the meaning of partnering through a variety of humanitarian assistance programs that paired the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces (RCAF) with American military counterparts from U.S. Pacific Command.

The relationship evolved through difficult periods marked by legislatively mandated restrictions on U.S. economic and security assistance in reaction to the 1997 coup. A prolonged

tug of war over Hun Sen's reluctance to adhere to U.S. Government conditions for Cambodian compliance with basic international standards of behavior on human rights, religious tolerance, and practices of good governance ensured close congressional scrutiny of U.S.-Cambodian relations. Hun Sen's imperious way of dealing with political opposition and his high-handed manner with a struggling legislature intent on preserving its independence heightened congressional concerns. Successive U.S. administrations approached bilateral relations with Cambodia as limited to narrowly defined lanes, drawn to prevent direct U.S. assistance to Hun Sen's government until such time as improvements in policies and practices could be certified to Congress by the President.

However, with tensions following the 1997 coup receding over time, the domestic situation in Cambodia began to change. The dynamic of U.S.-Cambodian relations improved and developed. Gradually, Cambodia has evolved into a responsible regional actor. It demonstrated a willingness to take steps against terrorist threats by making critical arrests of members of a network accused of planning attacks in the country and by breaking up a local branch of an international network of Islamic extremists. Increasingly, the basic practices of governance improved, and countervailing powers within the Cambodian political system reshaped the more egregious authoritarian practices of political leaders, though the

Report Documentation Page				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.					
1. REPORT DATE DEC 2009		2. REPORT TYPE		3. DATES COVERED 00-00-2009 to 00-00-2009	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Strategic Forum. Number 251, December 2009. U.S.-Cambodia Defense Relations: Defining New Possibilities				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S)				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) National Defense University, Institute for National Strategic Studies, Washington, DC, 20319				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT Same as Report (SAR)	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 6	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT unclassified	b. ABSTRACT unclassified	c. THIS PAGE unclassified			

Cambodians continued to be plagued by old patterns of capital city politics, corruption and malfeasance, irregularities in the conduct of elections, and lingering bad attitudes toward the emergence of interest groups, new political parties, and opposition to the long-ruling Hun Sen.

In this context, relations between Washington and Phnom Penh matured and evolved in a way that allowed a much more direct path of engagement between the U.S. military and RCAF, which adopted rational approaches to institutional growth, civil-military relations, human rights practices, and modernizing requirements. The Cambodian military, by 2008–2009, recognized the need to integrate the lessons of defense reforms, develop a new doctrine and modern organizational practices, sort out the issues surrounding the emerging need to improve maritime security capacity, and commit to multilateral cooperation in this and other areas of defense cooperation.

As one U.S. military security cooperation expert observed, RCAF modernization is on the fast track, but there are a lot of gaps in authorities, and there is a serious need to realign resources to meet requirements in order to develop a sound approach to securing inland waterways and ground borders and expanding RCAF capacity in peacekeeping, counterterrorism, civil-military operations, and disaster response.

Historical Context

To understand Cambodia today and discern the basis for the flexibility and adaptability that have shaped the first steps toward a new, more effective military engagement with RCAF, one has to go back to the origins of the coalition that shaped the last 10 years of fighting in Cambodia, before the UN-supervised settlement of a generation of war there.

The government in exile was concocted as a marriage of convenience between non-communists and the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK)—the rump of the Khmer Rouge (KR) party government evicted from Phnom Penh by the Vietnamese.

That coalition was aimed at making sure the Vietnamese invasion and occupation of Cambodia would not go unpunished. In many ways it seemed that the world united to protect the idea of sovereignty, not to guarantee the survival of the Cambodian people.

This coalition assembled along the borders with Thailand, along a large arc from Trat Province to Sisaket. It was composed of survivors, escapees, and refugees. They were students, military officers and troops, government officials and functionaries, businessmen, the middle class, and farmers. They were also overseas Cambodians, privileged elites, and professors. Thrown together in the camps, they coalesced on the basis of their own vigorous nationalism and their own identity as victims and survivors. The Sihanoukist National Army, the organizational heir to the royalist power of the Norodom line, and the Khmer People's Liberation Front, a paper tiger organization of nationalists intent on clinging to the embers of modernizing Cambodia, emerged in this context. They formed the core of the Non-Communist Resistance (NCR), and they were hopelessly outclassed by the Khmer Rouge, with whom they found themselves in uneasy alliance—the CGDK. The NCR was poorly organized, emotionally charged, and motivated in a detached and dangerous way. They were unprepared for the challenge of cohabiting in an artificial coalition with the Khmer Rouge and confronting KR forces in the field. They were politically naive and inexperienced, and unpracticed in the kind of command and control necessary to cope with the Khmer Rouge, a more sophisticated, better organized, ideologically motivated force.

From the late 1980s to the mid-1990s, working the Cambodian issue from the defense and security perspective was—in the U.S. interagency context—a distressing assignment, requiring one to explain why a country that had long been understood as strategically irrelevant should suddenly attract Department of Defense (DOD) attention, U.S. resources, diplomatic energy,

and international investments. And the truth is that for the longest time, Cambodia was indeed an afterthought—a “side show,” to use the dramatic metaphor William Shawcross selected as the title of his book on the Cambodian crisis. But the challenge of actually resolving the impasse, and ending decades' worth of internal conflict, pressed interested parties to urge this course of action, to involve the United States in local Southeast Asian efforts to define a framework for achieving peace, and to establish a stable government on the basis of the ruins of a civilization with a range of highly factionalized interest groups intent on being part of this equation.

The Defense Department became invested in the peace process, providing military observers to the UN peacekeeping force deployed to Cambodia and responding to the requirement for unique DOD airlift capabilities in association with efforts to position the UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC). And DOD ultimately agreed to a long argument on behalf of the idea of placing a U.S. Defense Attaché in Phnom Penh as early as 1994, in the context of the establishment of the Royal Cambodian Government.

That outpost contributed to modest and nonlethal efforts to shape a national army from the assortment of noncommunist forces that were involved in the long slog to peace:

■ The Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF), a motley assortment of modernists, self-proclaimed democratizers, anti-Sihanoukists, antimonarchists, and artifacts of the last government in Cambodia under Lon Nol, was headed by the aging Son Sann and his intellectual, French-educated son, Son Soubert. This force was supported in the field by the KPNLF armed forces, led by a range of former generals and statesmen, and well armed during the height of the conflict, but only marginally capable of anything more than brief (and frequently self-destructive) military acts.

■ The Sihanouk National Army (*Armée Nationale Sihanouk*, or ANS) was an unabashedly royalist-minded group devoted exclusively to Norodom Sihanouk and his son, Prince Norodom Ranarith, who served

Lewis M. Stern is a Visiting Research Fellow in the Institute for National Strategic Studies at the National Defense University.

as the chief executive officer for the armed forces and the political wing of the ANS.

■ The People's Republic of Kampuchea, Hun Sen's government, garnered legitimacy for itself in the form of the State of Cambodia as the force that bore the brunt of opposition to the Khmer Rouge, after having driven into Phnom Penh in 1978 as the leading edge to Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia, and as the core of the coalition that emerged under the protection of the Vietnamese forces in Cambodia.

■ The Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea, the Khmer Rouge in temporary coalition with the NCR, arrogated a role for itself in the coalition that assembled a government following the UNTAC-supervised election by accepting (but not adhering to) guarantees to disarm and sequester itself in distinctive and controllable zones.

The Emergence of Postwar Cambodia

The challenge for all concerned—the Cambodians, the UN, the United States, Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) members, and especially the former “frontline states” of Thailand and Singapore, the architects of the original peacekeeping structure (the Indonesians), and the international community—was to shape the framework to accommodate all these players, sustain the basic equation for a coalition government, and assemble a respectable national army and a workable structure of government on the ruins of these bloodied factions.

The framework called for a quadripartite formula for all national level instruments of governance. Ministries would reflect the four parties that participated in the peacekeeping and electoral process under UN supervision. Fashioning a unified national army, or a coherent, stable government, from this formula seemed impossible. The KPNLF, ANS, and proliferation of parties that emerged to contest in the election demanded a stake in the process. Between 1995 and 1997, none of the elements that were allowed to remain armed and to enter into the formation of a national army adopted a form of thinking that would have enabled the creation of a sin-

gle, coherent national military. The KPNLF and ANS, and Hun Sen, continued to speak in terms of their own interests and organizations, making claims for a fair and balanced equation for selecting senior generals, promoting general officers, and making defense policy and military strategy that served narrow organizational (not national) interests.

There were serious centrifugal forces at work here. The PRK showed itself to be far more adept at basic organizational tasks. The small group of Cambodians competing for influence who made up the core of the State of Cambodia—the rubric under which the PRK competed for influence during the peacekeeping period—retained the ministerial organization, the structure of departments bequeathed by PRK. They functioned

the challenge was to sustain the basic equation for a coalition government, and assemble a respectable national army and a workable structure of government

with a cadre-like set of staffing practices. They ran effective, organized meetings, and they deferred to a clear leadership. They took notes and sustained attention to key policy issues. They were familiar with bureaucratic practices and were a studied contrast with the monarchists, the Sihanoukist organization under the tight control of Norodom Ranarith and ultimately beholden to him personally; the monarchists were long on royal symbolism and protocol, but essentially incapable of the process, organization, and leadership needed to sustain a modern government. The KPNLF focused most of its attention on coping with Sihanoukist politics. From that core sprang Sam Rainsey, given to a virulent form of Cambodian nationalism that translated into an unbridled anti-Vietnamese platform preoccupied with confronting Hun Sen and undermining his iron lock on national power by any means possible.

Early U.S.-Cambodian Military Relations

These patterns dominated Cambodian politics through the late 1990s and the early 2000s, from the conflicted efforts to define common cause through the Hun Sen coup against his own government in 1997, and the subsequent uneasy years that focused primarily on coaxing Cambodia toward elections, a peaceful and fair-minded way of solving tough national issues, and reintegration into the region (and ASEAN membership).

Following the factional fighting in July 1997, U.S. legislation prohibited bilateral assistance to the central government. Other legislation required the United States to oppose International Financial Institution lending to the Cambodian government for all but basic human needs. A section on foreign operations in the Consolidated Appropriations Act for 2003 included “notwithstanding” language allowing bilateral assistance for basic education, cultural preservation, and combating human trafficking.

U.S. military assistance to the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces ceased in 1997. From that time forward, the United States invited a few RCAF representatives to multilateral meetings on humanitarian issues. Otherwise, support for the military and interaction with RCAF counterparts ceased.

In the aftermath of the July 1997 coup against Norodom Ranarith and the National United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful, and Cooperative Cambodia Party, Hun Sen developed a closer relationship with China, in part to make up for the manner in which the U.S. cessation of economic and security assistance dried up the possibility of Cambodian military access to U.S. training and hardware. In the late 1990s, Cambodia closed Taiwan's office in Phnom Penh and developed close trade relations with the People's Republic of China, with which it became enmeshed in a full program of public diplomacy including progressively higher level visits from Beijing and RCAF visits to China in the late 1990s and early 2000s in search of Chinese assistance. During 2000–2003, China promised Cambodian military delegations assistance in footing the

bill for RCAF's demobilization, construction of training and demobilization facilities, and unspecified hardware. Cambodia's frustration with the limits on U.S. assistance and the legislative parameters imposed on direct U.S. Government assistance to the Cambodian government and military in the aftermath of the 1997 coup promoted Phnom Penh's shopping expeditions.

Domestic Change

By the early 2000s, the domestic situation in Cambodia had changed. The dynamic of U.S.-Cambodian relations improved and developed, after years of congressional ire at Hun Sen and complex and restrictive legislation prohibiting direct U.S. assistance to the Royal Cambodian Government. Cambodia:

- demonstrated a willingness to cooperate with the regional association on transnational crime and efforts to control the flow of illicit narcotics
- sustained its work with the United Nations Development Program's counterterrorism efforts
- sent officials to the International Law Enforcement Academy in Bangkok, and worked with the U.S. Joint Interagency Task Force—West on counternarcotics missions focused on the Mekong, Poipet, Koh Kong, and Gulf of Thailand
- expressed an interest in working with the United States to gain a peacekeeping capability.

In 2003–2004, the Washington interagency policy community began to explore possibilities for resuming programs with RCAF. For example, in the Congressional Budget Justification for fiscal year 2004, the State Department proposed the use of international military education and training (IMET) funds for human rights and rule of law training to help professionalize RCAF.

Beijing had 6 years to develop relations with the Cambodian military in a vacuum created by the U.S. suspension of military relations in 1997:

- During 2000–2003, Cambodian military delegations visiting China were promised

that Beijing would help foot the bill for RCAF demobilization.

- Beijing invested in the construction of military training and demobilization facilities, offered training to RCAF, and promised unspecified hardware.

■ Senior Cambodian government and military officials privately expressed frustration with the limits on U.S. assistance and the legislative parameters imposed on U.S. Government assistance.¹

Cambodia began to evolve into a responsible regional actor, demonstrating a willingness to take effective steps against terrorist threats:

- Cambodia made critical arrests of foreigners associated with Jemaah Islamiyah.
- Phnom Penh crafted a new national policy on Islamic issues.
- Hun Sen defined his goal as seeking to exclude Wahhabism.
- Cambodia cooperated in the destruction of its stocks of surface-to-air missiles.

Party politics matured. Hun Sen became more strategic in his thinking about internal politics, and Norodom Ranarith factored himself out of the equation by failing to modernize his political organization, alienating friends and allies, and attempting to thrive on the fumes of diminishing royal influence.

Some old patterns endured, though. Cambodian politics remain a traditional capital city politics, removed from the interests of the countryside, highly personalized, and potentially primordial with a tendency to resolve conflict through violence. And while the drive-by politics that characterized Phnom Penh in the post-UNTAC period, through the late 1990s, has been somewhat civilized over time, the instincts for settling disputes in zero-sum terms have not quite been bled out of the Cambodian system.

Civil society has adapted, and begun to emerge, perhaps slightly less hesitantly than was the case after the UN-sponsored election in the mid-1990s. Cambodian officials have had exposure to other ways of doing business, organizing for impact and effectiveness, and conducting the business of government in accordance with standards of behavior and rule of law.

Younger, better educated, increasingly cosmopolitan Cambodian professionals have begun to articulate their interests, to act on what they know and have learned, and to make a difference in some meaningful if narrow ways. Cambodian officers have attended the Asia Pacific Center for Security Studies, studied at the Industrial College of the Armed Forces, used IMET monies to study English, and participated in other professionalizing, capacity-building training experiences.

These have made some differences, though they have not necessarily dulled the old instincts, cultural preferences, and historical patterns when it comes to conducting politics, managing relationships, exerting influence and authority, and undertaking the responsibilities of governance and defense.

Rebuilding Defense Relations

In 2004, after almost a year's worth of consultations with Congress, DOD launched modest efforts to rebuild defense relations with Cambodia, focusing on:

- reintegrating Cambodia into a system of multilateral conferences on terrorism, transnational issues, humanitarian disaster response conferences, and seminars on regional security; Cambodian government officials were invited to the Asia Pacific Center for Security Studies in Hawaii
- seeking to utilize appropriate resources on bilateral activities including demining, engineering training, search and rescue and disaster response, medical seminars, peacekeeping, and excess property programs
- acting in practical ways, such as planning a ship visit and dispatching assessment teams to work with RCAF on facility development; DOD also continued to explore opportunities for training, using IMET, and for foreign military sales supporting the development of a professional Cambodian military and relying on programs such as the Defense Resource Management program.

At this point, the Department of Defense continues to encourage Cambodia to adopt transparent governance, sustain the rule of law,

and hold fast to a democratic path. Cambodia has assumed a larger role in enhancing regional stability and sustaining cooperation on counterterrorism and counternarcotics cooperation. It has contributed demining troops to peacekeeping in Sudan and volunteered for peacekeeping in East Timor. Cambodia cooperates with the State Partnership Program, which pairs U.S. National Guard units with Cambodian provinces for practical cooperation, for example, on humanitarian assistance capability development. Cambodia is being encouraged to use IMET and foreign military financing resources for mainstream military purposes such as vehicle maintenance, logistics training, and peacekeeping operations capability development. And Cambodia has agreed to place a defense attaché in Washington, 14 years after we opened a Defense Attaché office in Phnom Penh.

Basis for Ongoing Cooperation

RCAF is now committed to a long-term process of reform and force structure review. The United States and other countries such as Australia are cooperating with the American-educated officers responsible for drafting three iterations of a forward-looking Cambodian defense white paper.² A core group of reformers within RCAF and the Royal Cambodian Government is committed to structural reform, which has had some initial success in the form of a maritime security initiative and the creation of a central coordinating authority for maritime security. The Cambodians have embraced a multiphased plan that began with a mid-August 2009 visit by representatives from the Naval Postgraduate School Center for Civil Military Relations; the school conducted a 1-day defense policy development workshop for senior defense leaders and 2 days of RCAF discussions on current defense policy. A high-level RCAF working group has been formed to take the outcomes from those discussions and develop new defense policies and a sound basis for a force structure review.³ In mid-September 2009, the working group was scheduled to visit Washington, DC, for discussions with U.S. defense experts, funded under Title 10 Asia Pacific Regional

Initiative funds. In the same time frame, Cambodian Minister of Defense Tea Banh visited the Pentagon for meetings with the Secretary of Defense.⁴ The Defense Strategy Review Working Group has been tasked with updating RCAF's defense strategic policy by the second quarter of fiscal year 2010. Key priorities are force modernization, border

Cambodia is intent on enhancing bilateral defense relations with the United States and hopes for U.S. involvement in its military modernization process

security, maritime security, counterterrorism, peacekeeping operations capacity, and civil-military operations. The top priority is addressing force structure and bureaucracy reforms, specifically how to reduce overlapping bureaucracies within the ministry of defense, the high command, and the army; and how to implement compulsory military service and fix the legal authorities to eliminate the estimated 10,000 personnel who are still on the rolls but are either retired, need to retire, or already deceased.

Cambodia is intent on enhancing bilateral defense relations with the United States and hopes for U.S. involvement in RCAF's modernization process. The Cambodian military leadership is prepared to discuss strategic policy development, plans and intentions for force modernization, border and maritime security, counterterrorism, peacekeeping operations capacity, and civil-military operations capacity.

The Way Forward

The United States joined the international community in making a commitment, through the UN, to help rebuild Cambodia. That mission carried with it a range of continuing responsibilities: building RCAF into a credible national institution from its origins as an army of competing factions, promoting

security, supporting economic development and better governance, and encouraging political reconciliation.

To sustain that commitment, and to ensure that U.S.-Cambodian defense and security cooperation continues on a positive trajectory, the two countries need to take specific deliberate steps.

First, the United States and its Cambodian partner need to continue the longstanding commitment to humanitarian mine action, the flagship program of successful collaboration between the United States and Cambodia since 1993. Cooperation with the Cambodian Mine Action Center (CMAC), Cambodia's national institution entrusted with clearing landmines and unexploded devices, needs to be sustained by the tandem effort of cultivating the continuing interest of international nongovernmental organizations in demining programs and developing an indigenous demining capacity through CMAC and the Cambodian Mine Action and Victim's Assistance Authority. Continuing cuts to foreign assistance funding to Cambodia will have a severe impact on a humanitarian mine action program that has, since the early 1990s, been a true model program in the region. Cambodia's contribution of a demining company to the UN Darfur mission beginning in April 2006 and its commitment to establishing a regional peacekeeping center are the most positive regional dividends from this early investment.

Second, Washington and Phnom Penh need to continue to take concrete steps toward cooperation in counterterrorism, including the development of Cambodia's potential as a force provider for stability operations, and cooperation on counternarcotics activism. Cambodian participation in peacekeeping exercises, involvement in development of resources such as the National Counterterrorism Center, and collaboration with the U.S. joint interagency task force on counternarcotics (including the development of a national training center) are notable models for future training cooperation that underscore Cambodia's commitment to playing a larger role in international and regional security. The effective utilization of IMET and Global Peacekeeping Operations Initiative resources available as the result

of shifts in the congressional view of Cambodian-U.S. cooperation allows concrete steps in these areas. Foreign military funding of communications and surveillance equipment and small boats that enabled Cambodia to begin addressing border security deficiencies needs to be continued.

Third, the bilateral commitment to highly visible acts of naval diplomacy, including ship visits and port calls by U.S. hospital ships such as the USNS *Mercy*, contribute to goodwill and stoke joint efforts to develop medical training, humanitarian assistance, and disaster relief capabilities.

Fourth, Cambodia needs to be unwavering in its commitment to the Defense Resource Management Study (DRMS) program, aimed at offering RCAF professional guidance on management practices, methods for enhancing transparency and accountability, means of acquiring new capabilities, and steps that could be taken to deepen bilateral staff and senior level military exchanges. RCAF has recognized the need to do more effective work in the area of retaining trained officers and specialists. The United States needs to follow through on the DRMS program as a mechanism for focusing on such issues.

Fifth, RCAF needs to place a defense attaché in Washington. The United States has had an Attaché in Phnom Penh since the establishment of the Royal Cambodian Government at the culmination of the UNTAC mission. The United States has long recommended that Phnom Penh consider the utility of opening a small defense attaché office in its modest embassy in Washington; this would be an important link in the chain of communications necessary to help the two countries work together on mutual security issues in a way that would enhance bilateral defense engagement. Cambodia is indeed committed to placing a defense attaché in Washington and should take the steps necessary to do so quickly in a way that would signal recognition that such an act would be a part of the formula for invigorating bilateral defense relations.

In Southeast Asia, the challenges are developing the new relationships singled out by the Secretary of Defense in his mid-2009 speech and cultivating the possibilities that spring from inventive forms of cooperation

and newly created niche capabilities in the context of severely constrained resources.

Cambodia is predisposed to a wide array of collaborative activities, including facility access, unique training, a robust schedule of ship visits, peacekeeping cooperation, and a much broader range of multilateral engagement aimed at taking on new challenges and transnational threats. Cambodia appears to be prepared to conduct port calls and ship visits, and might very well be amenable to underwriting these efforts with a cross-servicing agreement, diversifying ship visit activities to include flyouts, passing exercises, tandem port calls, and refueling exercises. Cambodia was very predisposed in the early 2000s to work with U.S. Pacific Command survey teams to discern military airport and maritime seaport modernization requirements.

After a generation of devastating armed conflict that imprinted severe divisions among several warring factions on Cambodia's political DNA, sapped national strength, and made Cambodia one of the world's neediest basket cases, the Royal Cambodian Government and Royal Cambodian Armed Forces appear to be positioned to commit to a partnership, are inclined to extend training opportunities and facility access to the United States, and are less hobbled by severe allergies to alignment, engagement, and the active presence of U.S. forces on Cambodian soil.

This makes Cambodia one of the building blocks of U.S. engagement policy in Southeast Asia, a potentially important part of the framework of alliances and friendships energized by a new approach to existing threats and contemporary challenges and founded in the effort to build partnership capacity.

Notes

¹ Some observers are concerned with the practice of Chinese defense and security engagement, specifically pointing to Beijing's support for an extensive program of "schools" in Southeast Asia (such as in Cambodia). The level, intensity, and continuity of that support might be far less than initially suspected. China committed to providing barracks for RCAF troops, and indeed publicly stated its willingness in 1997–1998 to provide training for RCAF, to make up the deficit resulting from the suspension of U.S. economic and security assistance in the aftermath of the Hun Sen quasi-coup. There may not be any RCAF officers or foreign military attachés in Phnom Penh prepared to say that the Chinese investments in the Cambodian military establishment were profound, systematic, and of enduring value. They were made at a time when a pittance would have been heralded by the leadership in Phnom Penh as a major windfall in the face of the end of the U.S. assistance program, such as it was in the 1996–1997 period. Frankly, China's willingness to make up the difference between the pre-coup level of U.S. foreign military sales and military training for Thailand in September 2006 is a much more compelling argument on behalf of the idea that China has designs to replace the United States, or at least to underscore how much more reliable Beijing is as a friend and ally and source of hardware and support.

² As a senior U.S. Army officer serving the security cooperation part of the relationship observed, the first white paper "was written by the only U.S. Army War College Alum[nus] and read by his boss. The second version was written by the same person and read within MoND [Ministry of National Defense]. The third version was written, printed, and read by the prime minister and others who have been quoting it. At this stage, they're ready to take it to the next level by bringing together all the leadership to review and comment on the strategy." Author email correspondence with senior U.S. Army officer, August 2009.

³ The Defense Security Review Working Group consists of Lieutenant General Nem Sowath, General Director for Policy and International Affairs Affairs, Ministry of Defense (MOD); Lieutenant General Suon Samnang, Deputy to Sowath and Director of Policy and Plans; MOD Major General Mam Sam, Chief of Cabinet to the Chief of General Staff; Major General Khiev Saphat, Deputy Director of Personnel Department; MOD Major General Phat Vibolsopheak, Director, International Relations Department; and MOD Brigadier General Hun Manet, Commander, National Counterterrorism Special Forces.

⁴ Tea Banh visited Washington in 1995 as Co-Defense Minister, when the State of Cambodia and the noncommunists were dividing the top seats of several strategic ministries. Co-Defense Minister Tea Chamrath visited Washington, DC, in 1994.

The Institute for National Strategic Studies (INSS) is a policy research and strategic gaming organization within the National Defense University (NDU) serving the Department of Defense, its components, and interagency partners. The institute provides senior decisionmakers with timely, objective analysis and gaming events and supports NDU educational programs in the areas of international security affairs and defense studies. Through an active outreach program, including conferences and publications, INSS seeks to promote understanding of emerging strategic challenges and policy options.



The Strategic Forum series presents original research by members of NDU as well as other scholars and specialists in national security affairs from this country and abroad. The opinions, conclusions, and recommendations expressed or implied within are those of the contributors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Defense or any other agency of the Federal Government. NDU Press also produces *Joint Force Quarterly* (JFQ) for the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. For more information on NDU Press and access to JFQ, visit the Web site at www.ndupress.edu.

INSTITUTE FOR NATIONAL STRATEGIC STUDIES

Eugene B. Rumer

Interim Director and Director of Research

David H. Gurney

Director, NDU Press