

Comment on “Cambodia’s Peace-building Experience”
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1. To avoid repeating the points already touched upon by previous distinguished speakers, I wish to highlight a few points on UN Mission in Cambodia in terms of the modality, strengths and the weaknesses of the United Nations Transitional Authority of Cambodia, with some references to the UN mission in Timor-Leste.
2. As for my comment on the Modality of the UN Mission in Cambodia, I would say that the U.N. Transitional Authority of Cambodia (UNTAC) was the turning point in the history of the UN missions as it was different from the traditional peace-keeping missions in terms of both their interests and responsibilities. While UNTAC was comprised of elements of traditional UN Peace Keeping, it was a comprehensive peace plan designed to bring peace, democracy, constitutionality, human rights, reconciliation and reconstruction to Cambodia. And it was considered as the most ambitious and expensive exercise the UN had ever undertaken, pushing the limits of peacekeeping even beyond its traditional models and established new precedents in international laws and practices. Although UNTAC inevitably incurred some flaws, it set new benchmarks to be taken by later UN operations. AS shown by the case in point, the UN mission in Timor, the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor, adopted the kind of model, which is entrusting 100% administrative power to the UN authority to fulfill its mandate of the restoration of peace, coordination and arrangement for humanitarian assistance during emergency phase, provision of assistance in the development of civil and social services, establishment of effective administration, and the support for the capacity-building for the self-installed government and the establishment of conditions conducive to sustainable development. Building on the experience of the peace-operation in Cambodia, UNTAET, the UN Mission in East Timor, is also considered a successful story in the UN peace-operation. In my opinion, the modality of the UN missions in Cambodia and Timor-Leste, goes beyond the traditional peace-keeping approach and becomes a subject to be studied and researched for the future UN missions.
3. As for UNTAC's first strength, I would like to highlight one of the core competencies which UNTAC transferred to Cambodia. UNTAC had the ability to organize elections believed by many as free and affairs. UN Staff in this area are skillful in voter registration, voter educations, and polling station organization. UNTAC gained much of its credibility from its effort to organize the successful

and credible general elections in Cambodia with impressive turnout of 90% of 4.7 million registered voters. “A secret ballot” is one of the key messages, which encouraged the people to vote. These skills and know-how were indirectly transferred to Cambodia through the Cambodian staff working during UNTAC time, some of whom are serving in the Cambodia’s National Election Committee. Through the competent National Election Committee, Cambodia could successfully organize free and fair general elections by itself in 1998 and 2003, and commune elections in 2002 and 2007. Cambodia will organize the next general elections in July 2008.

4. The second strength is that UNTAC, as well as other UN missions, can be served as training grounds creating career opportunity as international staff. During On-the Job Training period in peace-building in Timor-Leste, I met some UN personnel who told me that they had started a career in UN family in Cambodia. I also met Several Cambodians who had experiences working with UNTAC in Cambodia and are working for UN mission in Timor-Leste. Some of them now are dispatched to UN Mission in Sudan and Nepal.
5. Besides transferring knowledge in organizing elections and serving as training grounds, UNTAC had the ability to help prop up the existence of Civil Society, which is one of the useful elements in the democratization process. UNTAC helped create ADHOC, LICADO and Center for Social Development. The number of local NGOs in this field is now on the increase. To me, the civil society in Cambodia now is very active and representing the voice of the vulnerable groups in the Cambodian society. This trend will help Cambodia to be on track to the matured democracy.
6. Ladies and Gentlemen, now I would like to turn to the UNTAC weaknesses. One of the major weaknesses is the inability to do away with the unsettled issues due to its early departure. The first issue is the formation of a government after the elections. This issue was left to Cambodia itself to solve. The situation in Cambodia at that time was very fragile and politically and economically distrusted, forcing Cambodia to stand on its own feet in solving its own fate facing with the risk of returning to conflict and instability. Subsequently, a coalition government was established. It had not been working very well and breaking up in 1997. Another issue that UNTAC was not able to solve is the complaint of irregularities in the elections by CPP which claimed to find out some of them such as the open ballot boxes and the ballots being scattered along the road. There were no clear approaches to deal with CPP complaint. Fortunately, the weakness of leaving the mission too early in a fragile situation was improved in the UN Mission, UNTAET, in Timor-Leste which has been followed by other UN bodies such as UNMISSET, UNOTL, and UNMIT.
7. The most serious weakness of UNTAC was in the military field. UNTAC abandoned the demobilization and cantonment of the military forces due to Khmer Rouge refusal to join in the

process. As a consequence the stage was set for a continued civil war in the country following the withdrawal of UNTAC. And that civil war was resolved by the Win-Win policy of Prime Minister Hun Sen.

8. Another weakness is that UNTAC failed to have a contingency plan to deal with the unexpected incident in implementing the peace-process. In this case, Khmer Rouge, one of the signatories of the Paris Peace Agreement failed to implement its obligations to be disarmed and put their fighters under UNTAC cantonment, consequently boycotting the elections. To deal with Khmer Rouge, there were divergences within UNTAC hierarchy on the question whether to resort to military action. The approach not to use the military intervention to deal with the Khmer Rouge's boycott of the peace-process proved unsuccessful. The possible approach dealing with non-cooperative parties to the agreement should have been addressed in the contingency plan which should have been mapped out by the UN to avoid the internal conflict within UN mission decision makers. Unfortunately, this lesson has not been learned in the later UN mission as shown in the case of UN operation in East Timor organizing the Popular Consultation in 1999 to decide the future of East Timor. The mission similarly failed to have a contingency plan to deal with the risk of the non-cooperation to the Agreement. As a result, a tragedy and violence by the Indonesia militia occurred following the declaration of the result of popular consultation as Timorese choose independence. Therefore, it is vital for the UN to consider contingency plan to deal with the non-cooperative parties to the peace-agreement.
9. The last weakness I would like to mention is the misbehavior of UNTAC personnel. These undisciplined actions by UNTAC personnel include reckless driving, drunk driving, sexual abuse, enjoying prostitutions. 15 peacekeepers and two UNTAC civilian personnel were sent home for brawling and breaching other disciplines such as thief and alcohol-related disturbances. While defending the UNTAC soldiers, Anderson, the UNTAC Commander, acknowledged the existence of their misbehavior. "They were expected to govern but they didn't," lamented HOR Namhong, the then Cambodian Foreign Minister, labeling UNTAC as incapable of doing thing, taking opportunity to amass dollars and having no ideas of what their humanitarian mission should be". The weakness of lacking discipline on the part of UN personnel has, to a large extent, been improved in UN Mission in Timor Leste, as UN mission over-there had clear guidelines to prevent these negative phenomena and to restore the credibility of the UN mission. However, reckless driving is still a major problem in the UN mission in East Timor.
10. In conclusion, the UNTAC in Cambodia and the UNTEAT in Timor-Leste, though going beyond the traditional peacekeeping operation, proved to be effective in terms of modality in solving conflicts and bringing peace and development to the nations suffering so long from the devil act of war. Moreover, UNTAC did provide a useful reference for the peace builders including the academia and

practitioners to study and research its strengths and weaknesses for the improvement of any future UN mission for peace and development.

11. My final comment on peace-building is that the quicker the world help to build peace is the better as there are many conflicting arising after the cold-war. I sense this because my life experienced the evil act of war since I was born till Cambodia finally got total peace in 1998 when the government adopted the win-win policy, which the structure of the Khmer Rouge were totally collapsed. In 1972, I was born, my mom had to carry me to hide once the American Airplane came to bomb in my village. Around 1977, when I was about 6 year old under the Khmer Rouge regime, I was forced to work such carrying the cow dung and cutting small tree to make natural fertilizers. From 1979-1998 Cambodia, I experienced the regular fear situation, where we caught up in the middle of the fighting using raffle and hand rocket between the Khmer Rouge and the government, when the Khmer Rouge came to villages to plunders the villagers' properties such as porks, rices, ducks and chicken. These are the bitter experience I would like those who are unfortunately being experienced them get out quickly and also prevent them from happening. Therefore, I am strongly believe that HPC's peace-builder program, under the strong conviction of the Japan to lead in the peace-building with the strong support of ASEAN government, will definitely contribute to the building peace, stability and development in Asia Pacific region and the whole world.