

Case Study: Cambodia

Source 1: Map



Source 2: Timeline

1940s: Cambodian communist movement emerged from the country's struggle against French colonization.

1960s: King Norodom Sihanouk named his communist opponents the "Khmer Rouge." Their official name was the Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK).

1963: Pol Pot became the party secretary and leader of the CPK.

March 1970: Cambodian Civil War. Marshal Lon Nol and his pro-American associates staged a successful coup to depose Prince Sihanouk as head of state.

1973: The Khmer Rouge became a major player in the civil war and gained members because many people resented Lon Nol. At this time, 85 percent of Cambodian territory was controlled by the Khmer Rouge.

Rouge.

April 17, 1975: The Khmer Rouge took full control of the city of Phnom Penh in Cambodia. A few days later, they forced approximately two million people in Phnom Penh and other cities into the countryside to undertake agricultural work. Thousands of people died during the evacuations. Because of this and other policies, nearly two million people died during the Khmer Rouge regime from 1975-1979.

1976: The CPK created the state of Democratic Kampuchea and wrote the first "Four-Year Plan," which called for the collectivization of all private property and placed high national priority on the cultivation of rice. All Cambodians were required to bring their private possessions to be used collectively. Cambodian families were split up and people were assigned to work groups. The goal of the Four-Year plan was to achieve an average national yield of three tons of rice per hectare throughout the country. To achieve that goal, most Cambodians were forced to work harvesting rice more than 12 hours a day without rest or adequate food.

Late 1977: Clashes broke out between Cambodia and Vietnam. Tens of thousands of people were sent to fight and thousands were killed.

December 1978: Vietnamese troops and the forces of the United Front for the National Salvation of Kampuchea fought their way into Cambodia.

January 7, 1979: Vietnamese troops captured Phnom Penh. Khmer Rouge leaders fled west and reestablished their forces in Thai territory.

1979-1990: The United Nations recognized the Khmer Rouge as the only legitimate representative of Cambodia.

1982: Khmer Rouge formed the Triparty Coalition Government. At the same time, in Phnom Penh, Vietnam helped to create a new government regime called the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK), which governed Cambodia for a decade.

1990: Vietnamese troops withdrew from Cambodia.

October 23, 1991: All Cambodian parties signed a peace agreement in Paris and agreed to organize a national election under the supervision of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC). The Khmer Rouge boycotted the UN-organized election and refused to demobilize their forces.

1993: A newly elected government came to power called the Royal Government of Cambodia. For several years, Khmer Rouge soldiers continued to fight against these troops.

1998: Pol Pot died. Other senior Khmer Rouge leaders defected in 1998.

March 1999: The last surviving leader of the Khmer Rouge who refused to join the Royal Government of Cambodia, Ta Mok, was captured.

1999: The Khmer Rouge movement totally collapsed. All of its leaders had either defected to the Royal Government of Cambodia, been arrested or died.

Source 3: Encyclopedia Britannica

Cambodia became a French colony and during the 20th century experienced the turmoil of war, occupation by the Japanese, postwar independence, and political instability. Between 1975 and 1979 the country was devastated by the reign of the Khmer Rouge, a rural communist guerrilla movement. During the Khmer Rouge's period of power, at least 1.5 million Cambodians were killed or died, a monumental tragedy from which the country still suffers.

Khmer Rouge, (French: "Red Khmer") also called Khmers Rouges, radical communist movement that ruled Cambodia from 1975 to 1979 after winning power through a guerrilla war. It was purportedly set up in 1967 as the armed wing of the Communist Party of Kampuchea.

Cambodia's communist movement originated in the Khmer People's Revolutionary Party, which was formed in 1951 under the auspices of the Viet Minh of Vietnam. The party's largely French-educated Marxist leaders eventually renamed it the Communist Party of Kampuchea. By the late 1950s the party's members were engaged in clandestine activities against the government of Prince Norodom Sihanouk...

After a right-wing military coup toppled Sihanouk in 1970, however, the Khmer Rouge entered into a political coalition with him and began attracting increased support in the Cambodian countryside, a trend that was accelerated by the destructive U.S. bombing campaigns over Cambodia in the early 1970s. By this time the Khmer Rouge were also receiving substantial aid from North Vietnam, which had withheld its support during the years of Sihanouk's rule.

In a civil war that continued for nearly five years from 1970, the Khmer Rouge gradually expanded the areas of the Cambodian countryside under their control. Finally, in April 1975, Khmer Rouge forces mounted a victorious attack on the capital city of Phnom Penh and established a national government to rule Cambodia. The military leader of the Khmer Rouge, Pol Pot, became the new government's prime minister. The Khmer Rouge's rule over the next four years was marked by some of the worst excesses of any Marxist government in the 20th century, during which an estimated 1.5 million (and possibly up to 2 million) Cambodians died and many of the country's professional and technical class were exterminated.

Source 4: Textbook Entry

Ongoing Turmoil in Cambodia The end of the [Vietnam] war did not put an end to bloodshed and chaos in Southeast Asia, however. Cambodia (also known as Kampuchea) had suffered U.S. bombing during the war. And it remained unstable for years. In 1975, Communist rebels known as the Khmer Rouge set up a brutal Communist government under the leadership of Pol Pot. In a ruthless attempt to transform Cambodia into a rural society, Pol Pot's followers slaughtered 2 million people. This was almost one quarter of the nation's population. A Vietnamese invasion in 1978 overthrew the Khmer Rouge. The Vietnamese finally withdrew in 1989. In 1993, under the supervision of UN peacekeepers, Cambodia adopted a democratic constitution and held a free election. Pol Pot was captured and detained in 1997 for the war crimes he had committed.

Modern World History: Patterns of Interaction, McDougal Littell

Source 5: Paul R. Bartrop, *Encountering Genocide: Personal Accounts from Victims, Perpetrators, and Witnesses*

Genocide took place in Cambodia between April 17, 1975 and January 6, 1979, during the rule of communist dictator Pol Pot (1925-1998). His military forces, the Khmer Rouge, carried out a policy that aimed to totally erase all signs of French colonial rule and restore Cambodia to the pristine condition that prevailed before foreigners stamped their cultural traits on the land and its people.

For nearly four years, Cambodia was brutally eradicated of any evidence of “alien” ways. The primary targets were the cities, in particular the capital, Phnom Penh. Buildings and institutions were torn down, and the city’s population of nearly two million was uprooted and resettled in the countryside in order to purge citizens of their so-called bourgeois ways. This move would indoctrinate them, in turn, in rural, traditional Khmer (or Cambodian) culture, ostensibly unspoiled by colonialism and capitalism - the twin enemies of the anticolonialist, communist, and mono-ethnic nationalist Khmer Rouge. Millions were forced to undergo “re-education,” including public confessions, during which hundreds of thousands perished from exposure and lethal violence.

The Khmer Rouge’s fanaticism led to executions of “enemies” who covered the full spectrum of society. Intellectuals, artists, professionals, those who had traveled abroad, and those who spoke a foreign language were all targets. In short, all who embodied foreign - that is, anticommunist or non-Khmer-ideals were systematically killed, as they were deemed too “contaminated” to participate in building the new society under Pol Pot’s rule. The Khmer Rouge was so committed to destroying the old society and creating a new one that it completely obliterated even the most fundamental of social forms, namely, the family; this is to say nothing of such expressions of modernity as transportation, education, technology, administration, and governance. Under Khmer Rouge rule, all citizens were compelled to be dedicated to serving *Angka*, “the Organization,” from which everything was to emanate in the new Democratic Republic of Kampuchea.

Up to 40 percent of the deaths in this new regime were caused by starvation and disease, as Cambodia’s traditional agricultural systems, markets, and family plots were all eliminated and replaced by directed and viciously applied policies from the Party Center.

By the time the carnage was over, stopped by an invasion from Vietnam in January 1979, it is estimated that at least 1.7 million (and perhaps up to 2 million) people had been killed, the equivalent of one in four Cambodians. The number of deaths caused by Pol Pot’s brutal regime renders this one of the greatest tragedies of the twentieth century. Among the dead, deliberately targeted for extinction, were Buddhist monks and non-Khmer minorities, including the Muslim Chams, ethnic Chinese, and Vietnamese.

It should be made clear, though, that the vast majority of those whose lives were lost under the Khmer Rouge regime were mainstream Cambodians, and not members of any of the minority populations. This brings up some difficulties related to the United Nations Convention on Genocide (UNCG) definition of genocide, primarily regarding whether or not it can be called genocide when a regime targets members of its own majority group on the grounds of social background or political belief - which was why most of the victims in Cambodia perished.

Many of the crimes committed by the Khmer Rouge may not easily be termed genocide in its strict legal sense. If the overwhelming majority of the deaths were those of Cambodia's Khmer people - thus leading some to term what happened as "autogenocide" - then, it has been argued, the experience of the Khmer people under Pol Pot does not fall within the legal definition of genocide. Moreover, the UNCG requires proof of a specific intent to destroy the group being targeted, presenting further difficulties of definition. Because of the destruction of ethnic minorities, however, and because of Pol Pot's deliberate targeting of Cambodians living in the country's Eastern Zone toward the end of the regime, there should be little hesitation in applying the term genocide, to these crimes at least.

Paul R. Bartrop, *Encountering Genocide: Personal Accounts from Victims, Perpetrators, and Witnesses*

Source 6: "Literacy and Education under the Khmer Rouge," By George Chigas and Dmitri Mosyakov. The Cambodian Genocide Program, Yale University.

In order for the Party to pursue its ideological objectives of first "wiping the slate clean" and then "writing on the slate," it had to maintain control over the population both physically and mentally. It is therefore not surprising that the educational objectives described in the "Four-Year Plan" were pursued slowly and cautiously. Some of the initiatives were eventually enacted, especially those that afforded the Party the most control over people. For example, after 1977, primary education was provided on a limited basis when some primary schools opened in villages. However, these schools were only for base (i.e. rural) people and their children, and many survivors, particularly "new people," do not remember the existence of schools.

One of the purposes of these schools was to teach the population the "correct" way to read and write. The correct way to read was to read as a "peasant" ... That is, one should read in an uncritical and passive way, taking things at face value and not questioning the meaning or source of the text. Many base people had received traditional Buddhist educations in a *pagoda*, or, in the case of women, at home, where they would have been taught through rote learning. This kind of reader would take the rhetoric of the revolution at face value without questioning underlying motives. The most dangerous kind of reader, on the other hand, was the person who critically examined the Party line and its goals. According to the logic of the Party Center, these readers were potential traitors who wanted to sabotage the revolution. They were typically "new people" who had been educated in Phnom Penh or other urban centers under the French curriculum. They were thus "corrupted by imperialistic ideas" that were anathema to the goals of the revolution.

There were also reasons for the Party to be wary of using written propaganda. If written propaganda had been widely distributed during the regime's early stages, "new people" would have had the role of disseminating its message to the base people, who were, in many cases, illiterate. This would have posed a threat to the Party's authority. It was therefore necessary to assert firm control over printed materials and the way they were received before large scale efforts to produce and disseminate written propaganda could take place. The Khmer Rouge accomplished this first by eliminating all those who read "incorrectly," and second by educating the population on how to read "correctly," beginning with children and base people.

"Tung Padewat" (Revolutionary Flag) Magazine

Nonetheless, newspapers, the media, and the publication of magazines were powerful tools for convincing Cambodians that they were united by a common struggle. The Khmer Rouge, no doubt, had this in mind when they produced their revolutionary propaganda. At least three magazines were published monthly throughout the DK regime for Khmer Rouge cadres. These publications would have been among the few reading materials acceptable to the Party as it pursued its attempt to redefine Cambodian history and society.

<http://www.yale.edu/cgp/literacyandeducation.html>

Source 7: The following documents translated by the CGP from the Santebal archives at the Documentation Center of Cambodia comprise selected 1975-77 correspondence to and from the Prime Minister of Democratic Kampuchea and General Secretary of the ruling Communist Party of Kampuchea, Pol Pot, alias Brother Pol, alias "Comrade Secretary", alias 870, or Brother 87.

Telegram N° 15

To Comrade Brother Pol with respect,

...

The Region and Districts have gathered adequate numbers of people as we wanted. They have to withdraw from Region 21. We have already transported them to the other side of the river. Both of the [receiving] points absolutely refuse to accept Islamic people. They take only pure Khmer people. So the people who were withdrawn on the 30th have big problems.

...

I advised the Region and Districts to take the Islamic people back to their villages. According to the final decision of the meeting, we must not send the Islamic people to Kracheh [Province].

...

In principle, the Zone withdrew fifty thousand people to the North. More than one hundred thousand additional Islamic people remain in the Eastern Zone. We only withdrew the people in important places along the river and at the border. We did not withdraw the people from Tbaung Khmum. This withdrawal is the dispersal strategy according to the decision that you, Brother, had discussed with us before. But if the North refuses to accept them, we'll continue to do our best to keep charge of the Islamic people. This is not a problem.

But we will not have enough people to reach the one hundred fifty thousand, if the Northern Zone will not accept the Islamic people.

Best wishes to [you] Brother, for good health and success.

30 November 1975

Chhon

copies sent to:

Brother Noun

Brother Doeun

Brother Yem

Source 8: Seath K. Teng, "The End of Childhood," in Dith Pran, comp., and Kim De-Paul, ed., *Children of Cambodia's Killing Fields: Memoirs by Survivors* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), pp. 157-158.

Savuth Penn was 11 at the time of the evacuation of all military and civilian officials from the Lon Nol regime.

"They shipped my father and the rest of the military officers to a remote area northwest of the city... then they mass executed them, without any blindfolds, with machine guns, rifles, and grenades... My father was buried underneath all the dead bodies. Fortunately, only one bullet went through his arm and two bullets stuck in his skull. The bullets that stuck in his skull lost momentum after passing through the other bodies. My father stayed motionless underneath the dead bodies until dark, then he tried to walk to his hometown during the night... The Khmer Rouge threatened that if anyone was hiding the enemy, the whole family would be executed. My father's relatives were very nervous. They tried to find a solution for my family. They discussed either poisoning my father, hiding him underground, or giving us an ox cart to try to get to Thailand... The final solution was reached by my father's brother-in-law. He informed the Khmer Rouge soldiers where my father was... A couple of soldiers climbed up with their flashlights and found him hiding in the corner of our cabin... The soldiers then placed my father in the middle of the rice field, pointed flashlights, and shot him."

Savuth Penn, "The Dark Years of My Life," in Dith Pran, comp., and Kim De-Paul, ed., *Children of Cambodia's Killing Fields: Memoirs by Survivors* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), pp. 44-46.

Seath K. Teng was four years old when she was separated from her family.

"We worked seven days a week without a break. The only time we got off work was to see someone get killed, which served as an example for us... In the center of the meeting place was one woman who had both of her hands tied behind her. She was pregnant and her stomach bulged out. Before her stood a little boy who was about six years old and holding an ax. In his shrill voice he yelled for us to look at what he was going to do. He said that if we didn't look, we would be the next to be killed. I guess we all looked, because the woman was the only one killed that day. The little boy was like a demon from hell. His eyes were red and he didn't look human at all. He used the back of his ax and slammed it hard on the poor woman's body until she dropped to the ground. He kept beating her until he was too tired to continue."

Seath K. Teng, "The End of Childhood," in Dith Pran, comp., and Kim De-Paul, ed., *Children of Cambodia's Killing Fields: Memoirs by Survivors* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), pp. 157-158.

Source 9: Obituary from Deutsche Welle (DW) is Germany's international broadcaster.

8.22.2015

Leng Thirith, a leading female figure in Cambodia's murderous Khmer Rouge regime has died at the age of 83. She faced charges of genocide and crimes against humanity.

A UN-backed tribunal court said Thirith passed away "at approximately 10.30 a.m. (0330 UTC) on August 22 in Pailin, Cambodia. "She was released under a regime of judicial supervision. She remained under judicial supervision until her death," the statement from the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC) added. Although the charges against her were never dropped, the case was suspended in 2012 after the court ruled she was unfit to stand trial due to progressive dementia.

Genocide

Thirith was one of the few women in the leadership of the Khmer Rouge movement. She was a sister-in-law of the movement's late supreme leader, Pol Pot and wife to Ieng Sary, the regime's former foreign minister, who died in 2013 at age 87.

The radical communist party seized power in 1975. Over the following four years, an estimated 1.7 million people in Cambodia died of starvation, exhaustion, lack of medical care or execution.

'Direct involvement'

According to documents from the ECCC, Thirith was not a member of the regime's powerful standing committee but did sit on its council of ministers as social affairs minister.

"Ieng Thirith was personally and directly involved in denying Cambodians even the most basic of healthcare during the regime's years in power," said Youk Chhang, director of the Documentation Center of Cambodia which researches the atrocities.

Thirith allegedly ordered purges of suspected traitors in her ministry who were sent to re-education camps, and was aware of the regime's killing of perceived enemies.

She also allegedly participated in the regime's regulation of marriage - including its orchestration of mass forced marriages - and remained an ardent supporter of the Khmer Rouge long after its demise in the 1990s.

Source 10: Website, "Cambodia: Anatomy of a Genocide," created by three students at Rutgers University. <https://sites.google.com/site/anatomyofagenocidecambodia/u-s-response>

As the genocide occurred in Cambodia, the United States response remained limited. While the lack of military response could be justified by the aftermath of United States involvement in Vietnam and the ensuing climate of "Southeast Asia fatigue," Power finds striking the lack of even a 'soft response' to the genocide. "Neither President Ford nor President Carter, who took office in January in 1977, was going to consider sending U.S. troops back to Southeast Asia. But it is still striking that so many

Americans concluded that *nothing at all could be done*. Even the 'soft' response options that were available to the United States were passed up" (Power 123).

In *A Problem from Hell*, Power notes that the United States barely even denounced the massacres (Power 123). And in her article "Raising the Cost of Genocide," Power points out that President Ford initially denounced the Khmer Rouge's actions for a month only to then go largely silent on the matter, and that President Jimmy Carter, in his first two years as president, made no mention of the massacres taking place in Cambodia. According to Power, "Bilateral denunciations of the United States may well have had little effect on the Khmer Rouge's internal practices. Unfortunately, because so few U.S. officials spoke out publicly against the genocide, we cannot know" (Power 126).

President Carter first publicly denounced the Khmer Rouge in April 1978. Carter sent a message to an independent commission examining the atrocity reports in Oslo:

"America cannot avoid the responsibility to speak out in condemnation of the Cambodian government, the worst violator of human rights in the world today. Thousands of refugees have accused their government of inflicting death on hundreds of thousands of Cambodian people through the genocidal policies it has implemented over the past three years...It is in obligation of every member of the international community to protest the policies of this or any nation which cruelly and systematically violates the right of its people to enjoy life and basic human dignities."

Source 11: Website, "Cambodia: Anatomy of a Genocide," created by three students at Rutgers University. <https://sites.google.com/site/anatomyofagenocidecambodia/u-s-response>

Cambodia was one of the countries who ratified the Genocide Convention in 1951, but genocide charges were never brought against the Khmer Rouge regime. Neither the US nor its EU called attention to the atrocities as they were occurring. Israel became the first country to raise the issue of a potential genocide in Cambodia. In March, 1978, Britain's UN representative responded to popular pressure from the main churches of England by raising the subject before the UN commission on Human Rights (UNCHR), and called for the appointment of a special human rights rapporteur to investigate. Soviet Union, Yugoslavia and Syria teamed up to block even this rhetorical route, delaying consideration of Cambodian's human right. Three years after the genocide, no official UN body condemned the slaughter.

In 1977 and 1978, the atrocity of Khmer Rouge were revealed on the UN. The KR responded by claiming that "British citizens enjoyed only the right to be slaves, thieves, prostitutes, or unemployed." On April 1978, the KR's Foreign Affairs Minister Ieng Sary wrote a letter to the UN denouncing the "propaganda machine of the imperialists, the expansionists, annexionist" who charged them with mass killing. He said, "There is no reason for the KR to reduce the population or to maintain it at its current level," he wrote, "since today's population of 8 million is well below the potential of the country, which needs more than 20 million."

Many scholars linked the genocide in Cambodia to the Holocaust in order to make the US and UN take action. In an April 1978 New York Time editorial entitled "Silence is Guilt," William Safire also

referred to the Holocaust and asked why the world was doing nothing?

Source 12: Letter from Prince Sirik Matak, a former Lon Nol ally to Ambassador Dean in April 1975, <http://www.edwebproject.org/sideshow/history/end.html>

Dear Excellency and friend,

I thank you very sincerely for your letter and for your offer to transport me towards freedom. I cannot, alas, leave in such a cowardly fashion.

As for you and in particular for your great country, I never believed for a moment that you would have this sentiment of abandoning a people which has chosen liberty. You have refused us your protection and we can do nothing about it. You leave us and it is my wish that you and your country will find happiness under the sky.

But mark it well that, if I shall die here on the spot and in my country that I love, it is too bad because we are all born and must die one day. I have only committed the mistake of believing in you, the Americans.

Please accept, Excellency, my dear friend, my faithful and friendly sentiments. Sirik Matak.

Source 13: President Carter publicly denounced the Khmer Rouge in April of 1978. "Human Rights Violations in Cambodia," April 21, 1978, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Jimmy Carter, 1978*, vol. 2 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1979), pp. 767-768

"America cannot avoid the responsibility to speak out in condemnation of the Cambodian government, the worst violator of human rights in the world today. Thousands of refugees have accused their government of inflicting death on hundreds of thousands of Cambodian people through the genocidal policies it has implemented over the past three years... It is an obligation of every member of the international community to protest the policies of this or any nation which cruelly and systematically violates the right of its people to enjoy life and basic human dignities."