

Forum: Historical Security Council - HSC

Issue: (202) The Cambodian-Vietnamese War

Student Officer: Felix Yu (IBSH)

Position: Deputy-President

Introduction

“History doesn't repeat itself but it often rhymes” - Mark Twain

The Cambodian-Vietnamese War, a conflict underlining greater themes such as the Sino-Soviet split, humanitarianism versus sovereignty, and deeper ideological rivalries, emerged in the aftermath of the Vietnam War. Just 13 days before the fall of Saigon ending the Vietnam War, the Khmer Rouge, also known as the Communist Party of Kampuchea, came to power and began their brutal rule under the newly established Democratic Kampuchea. Despite both states adopting a communist ideology, the extreme nationalist and anti-Vietnamese sentiment from Cambodia swiftly escalated border tensions. Neighboring states such as Laos were also drawn in, shaping and complexifying the situation even more. By mid-1975, these tensions erupted into armed skirmishes, as the Khmer Rouge launched cross-border attacks into Vietnamese territory, resulting in civilian casualties and increasing instability. Furthermore, international actors became increasingly involved; China and the Soviet Union contributed to the deepening of the Sino-Soviet split by backing opposing sides, while the United States condemned and sanctioned Soviet-backed Vietnam diplomatically for violating Cambodia's sovereignty, while opposing Hanoi's growing regional dominance in Indochina..

Resolving this issue requires addressing historical grievances, careful analysis of Cold War relations and power dynamics, and critically evaluating whether the protection of human rights can justify the violation of state sovereignty. Along with this, note the importance of maintaining regional stability and dealing with the issue with extreme urgency.

Definition of Key Terms

State Sovereignty -

State Sovereignty is the principle that a nation has the primary authority over its territory and population. It follows from the idea that no state may “intervene in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any other State” (Art. 2.7 of the UN Charter). This concept is sanctified by the UN Charter, which states that the organization is based on the “sovereign equality” of all Member States (Art. 2.1 of the UN Charter). In international relations, state sovereignty therefore implies non-intervention, where other states are expected not to interfere in a country’s internal matters.

Cold War -

From 1947–1991, the Cold War was a period of political, ideological, and strategic tension between rival power blocs, primarily the United States and its allies against the Soviet Union and its satellite states. These tensions stemmed from disagreements over Soviet expansion in Eastern Europe, the mutual fear of nuclear annihilation, and the struggle for ideological and economic influence, and were characterized by political maneuvering, military coalitions, espionage, propaganda, arms buildups, economic aid, and proxy wars between other nations. In the context of the Cambodian-Vietnamese War, a proxy conflict, the Cold War did not follow a simple East–West divide, but instead reflected fractures within the communist bloc itself, caused by differing strategic interests and rapidly changing ideological differences.

Khmer Rouge -

The Khmer Rouge, led by Pol Pot, was a term used to describe the extremist communist regime based in Cambodia, driven by a fusion of Maoist ideology and intense Khmer nationalism, reminiscent of the powerful Khmer empire based almost a thousand years ago. The Khmer Rouge viewed Vietnam as a regional and existential threat with their extensive history of territorial disputes, including the Kampuchea Krom (Lower Cambodia) region, located in the Mekong River Delta in Vietnam. Along with their rivalry with Vietnam, the Khmer Rouge was known for the systematic mass killings that took place there, under the rule of dictator Pol Pot. From forced evacuation, extreme agricultural collectivization, mass executions, starvation, and disease, over a quarter of the Cambodian population died.

Year Zero -

"Year Zero" was the radical ideological concept implemented by the Khmer Rouge under Pol Pot, marking the start of a complete societal reset in Cambodia. Influenced by deep-seated fears of foreign domination, centuries of territorial loss to Vietnam, and an absolutist interpretation of Maoism, Pol Pot believed Cambodian society had to be entirely erased and rebuilt into a “pure” agrarian communist state. This vision led to the abolition of cities, considered corrupt hubs of capitalism and foreign influence; the suppression of religion, viewed as a competing ideology threatening the absolute authority of the party and state; and the targeting of intellectual life, perceived as dangerous, pro-Western, and counter-revolutionary. Under the banner of Year Zero, the Khmer

Rouge carried out mass purges and ethnic violence, portraying Vietnamese people, ethnic minorities, and perceived “internal enemies” as existential threats. This policy resulted in the Cambodian Genocide, with victims including ethnic groups, religious minorities, political opponents, urban residents, and anyone labeled an enemy of the state.

Proxy Conflict -

A proxy conflict is an armed struggle where opposing major powers support different sides without directly engaging in open warfare. Instead, these major powers provide military aid, funding, weapons, training, or political backing to the states involved. Oftentimes, these third party powers support combatants in an effort to influence the conflict’s outcome and thereby to advance their own strategic interests or to undermine those of their opponents. One example of a proxy conflict is the Cambodian-Vietnam War, with Vietnam receiving substantial military aid from the Soviet Union, while the Khmer Rouge was backed by China. Both powers used the conflict as a means of extending their strategic and ideological influence in the region without engaging in direct confrontation, making the war a manifestation of Cold-War great-power competition.

Sino-Soviet Split -

The Sino-Soviet Split was the political, ideological, and strategic breakdown of relations between the People’s Republic of China and the Soviet Union during the Cold War era. Despite both states being communist and the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance, and Mutual Assistance being signed between the two nations in 1950, they disagreed over interpretations of Marxism-Leninism, leadership of the global communist movement, and foreign policy, shifting from allies to rivals in the 1950s–60s. The divide deepened when key events such as the Soviet-Albanian rupture, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) condemning the 22nd Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) Congress in 1961, and the Sino-Indian War occurred.

This split played a big role in the Cambodian-Vietnamese War, with the Soviet Union supporting communist Vietnam, ensuring that the newly sovereign state remained in the Soviet sphere of influence, while China backed the communist Khmer Rouge in Cambodia as part of a broader effort to counter Soviet influence in Asia.

Brévié Line -

The Brévié Line was a colonial administrative boundary established in 1939 by French Governor-General Jules Brévié to separate Cambodian and Vietnamese jurisdiction in parts of southern Indochina, particularly in the Mekong Delta region. Although intended as an internal administrative measure rather than an international border, the line later became politically significant after independence. Cambodian nationalists, including the Khmer Rouge, viewed the Brévié Line as evidence of colonial-era territorial loss to Vietnam, while Vietnam treated the boundary as a legitimate administrative precedent. Disputes over its interpretation contributed to

long-standing border tensions that fed into the Cambodian–Vietnamese War.

Kampuchea Krom -

Kampuchea Krom refers to the southern Mekong Delta region that was historically part of the Khmer Empire but later came under Vietnamese control and today constitutes southern Vietnam. For many Cambodians, particularly nationalist and Khmer Rouge narratives, Kampuchea Krom symbolizes centuries of territorial loss and Vietnamese expansion. The region's contested historical status fueled anti-Vietnamese sentiment in Cambodia and was used by the Khmer Rouge to justify hostility toward Vietnam, contributing to the tensions that preceded the Cambodian–Vietnamese War.

Sphere of Influence -

A geographical region or a group of states which a powerful country exerts significant political, military, economic, or ideological control without direct governance. This influence is often maintained with treaties, alliances, economic aid, or diplomatic pressure rather than formal colonization. During the Cold War, powerful states such as the USSR, the People's Republic of China, and the United States sought to expand their spheres of influence by supporting governments and proxy forces, including in Southeast Asia, where the three powers competed for influence during the Cambodian-Vietnamese War.

History

Cambodian Genocide -

The Cambodian Genocide was carried out by the Khmer Rouge regime under Pol Pot, resulting in the deaths of roughly 1.5–2 million people, about a quarter of the nation's population. At its core, the genocide was driven by extremist Maoist-inspired ideology and radical Khmer nationalism. The Khmer Rouge believed that the Cambodian society was corrupt, hierarchical, and influenced by foreign powers, and that true revolutionary purity could only be achieved by destroying existing social structures, including cities, markets, religious institutions, and intellectual classes. Policies of forced labor, collectivization, starvation, and mass executions characterized this ideological commitment, producing one of the twentieth century's deadliest state-led genocides and destabilizing the region, contributing to the outbreak of the Cambodian–Vietnamese War.

Siamese–Vietnamese Wars -

The Siamese–Vietnamese Wars were a series of conflicts fought primarily during the late 18th and early 19th centuries between the Kingdom of Siam (now modern-day Thailand) and the Nguyễn Dynasty of Vietnam over influence and control in mainland Southeast Asia. Cambodia, weakened by internal divisions and dynastic instability, became a central battleground and buffer state between the two powers. Both Siam and Vietnam intervened militarily and politically in Cambodian affairs, installing rival rulers and asserting partial dominion at different points. Over time, Vietnam expanded its influence eastward and southward, incorporating Kampuchea

Krom into Vietnamese territory. These wars entrenched a pattern in which Cambodia was repeatedly dominated by stronger neighbors, particularly Vietnam. These wars entrenched a long-standing fear of Vietnamese expansionism and cultural domination within Cambodian political consciousness, shaping nationalist narratives well into the twentieth century. Eventually, these grievances were instrumentalized by the Khmer Rouge, who portrayed Vietnam as an existential threat to Cambodian sovereignty rooted in centuries of territorial loss, exacerbating border disputes, justifying aggressive policies, and intensifying mutual hostility after 1975.

Vietnam War -

The Vietnam War was a prolonged conflict between communist North Vietnam and anti-communist South Vietnam, deeply shaped by Cold War rivalry. North Vietnam, under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh, sought national reunification under a communist system and was supported by both the Soviet Union and China. While the Soviet Union aimed to counter U.S. influence and expand its ideological presence in the region, China viewed North Vietnam as a strategic buffer to protect its southern border from perceived American encroachment. The United States, motivated by the domino theory, the belief that the spread of communism in one state would trigger a chain reaction across neighboring countries, provided extensive military, economic, and political support to the anti-communist South Vietnam. As the war intensified, fighting increasingly spilled beyond Vietnam's borders, particularly into neighboring Cambodia and Laos, where North Vietnamese forces used border regions for supply routes along the Ho Chi Minh Trail. U.S. bombing campaigns and ground operations in Cambodia destabilized the country, contributing to widespread displacement, economic collapse, and the erosion of state authority.

The Vietnam War directly destabilized Cambodia and created the conditions that enabled the rise of the Khmer Rouge, whose seizure of power in 1975 fundamentally altered regional dynamics. The spillover of violence and foreign intervention deepened Cambodian resentment toward Vietnam and foreign powers alike, while simultaneously militarizing Vietnamese leadership and entrenching its perception of regional security threats. After reunification, Vietnam emerged as a highly experienced and heavily armed state determined to secure its borders and influence in Indochina. These dynamics transformed historical mistrust into open hostility, making armed confrontation between Democratic Kampuchea and Vietnam increasingly likely and setting the stage for the Cambodian–Vietnamese War.

Cambodian Civil War -

The Cambodian Civil War was a conflict between the U.S.-backed Khmer Republic, led by General Lon Nol, and the communist Khmer Rouge (Communist Party of Kampuchea, CPK). The war began after the 1970 coup that ousted Prince Norodom Sihanouk and escalated due to Cold War dynamics, foreign intervention, and internal political instability. North Vietnam and China provided support to the Khmer Rouge, while the United States and South Vietnam backed the Lon Nol government. The conflict caused widespread civilian displacement, economic collapse, and instability, ultimately enabling the Khmer Rouge to seize Phnom Penh in April 1975, ending the

monarchy and establishing Democratic Kampuchea. The civil war directly set the stage for the Cambodian genocide and heightened tensions with Vietnam.

Ba Chúc Massacre and Related Events -

The Ba Chúc Massacre occurred in April 1978 when Khmer Rouge forces launched a large-scale attack on the Vietnamese border town of Ba Chúc, located in An Giang Province in southern Vietnam. Over several days, Khmer Rouge troops killed an estimated 3,000 civilians, including men, women, and children, in one of the deadliest cross-border raids during the prelude to the Cambodian–Vietnamese War. Villages near the border were also attacked, and widespread looting, destruction of homes, and forced displacement occurred. This assault followed smaller incursions and border skirmishes by the Khmer Rouge starting in 1975, including when Khmer Rouge forces launched attacks on the Vietnamese-controlled Phu Quoc and Tho Chu Islands, killing 528 civilians, motivated by territorial disputes, historical grievances over Kampuchea Krom, and the Khmer Rouge's perception of Vietnam as an expansionist threat aligned with the Soviet Union.

The massacre had extreme consequences for the escalation of conflict between Vietnam and Democratic Kampuchea. It marked a turning point in Hanoi's perception of the Khmer Rouge, demonstrating that diplomatic warnings and border negotiations were ineffective against Pol Pot's regime. The brutality and scale of the attacks galvanized Vietnamese public and military opinion, legitimizing preparations for a full-scale intervention. Strategically, the massacre highlighted the vulnerability of Vietnamese border regions to Cambodian aggression and the need for Vietnam to secure its southern frontiers. Internationally, the Ba Chúc Massacre contributed to heightened Cold War tensions, as the attack involved the proxy dynamics of Chinese support for the Khmer Rouge and Soviet backing for Vietnam, linking localized violence to larger geopolitical struggles.

1954 Geneva Accords -

The 1954 Geneva Accords were a set of agreements reached at the Geneva Conference in Switzerland, intended to bring an end to the First Indochina War between French colonial forces and the Viet Minh. The accords temporarily divided Vietnam at the 17th parallel into North Vietnam (Democratic Republic of Vietnam) and South Vietnam (Republic of Vietnam), with the understanding that national elections would be held in 1956 to reunify the country. The accords also recognized the independence and neutrality of Cambodia and Laos. While the Geneva Accords aimed to stabilize the region, they left unresolved political tensions, colonial difficulties, and Cold War dynamics, contributing indirectly to the Vietnam War and creating conditions that would later influence cross-border relations with Cambodia, setting the stage for future conflict in the region.

Key Issues

Following decades of colonial rule under French Indochina, a French colony composed of modern-day Laos, Vietnam, and Cambodia, along with the destabilization caused by the First and Second Indochina Wars, both

Cambodia and Vietnam entered the post-independence period with unresolved territorial disputes and deep mutual distrust. Prior to the rise of the Khmer Rouge, Cambodia was ruled by Prince Norodom Sihanouk, who pursued a policy of semi-toleration towards the Viet Cong and People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN) activity within Cambodian borders during the Vietnam War. The Sihanouk Trail, a logistical supply line in Cambodia was used by the communist PAVN and its Viet Cong guerillas, which allowed a major staging ground, supply line, and sanctuary to attack the U.S. backed, anti-communist South Vietnam. This undermined Cambodian neutrality and pushed the state into taking sides in the Indochina Wars, while also leading to uproar and instability within the country. In 1970, Sihanouk was overthrown by U.S.-backed General Lon Nol, who established the Khmer Republic, aligned against communist forces. Amid Cold War tensions, the United States adopted a policy of containment, blocking the spread of Soviet-backed communism worldwide through alliances (NATO), economic aid (Marshall Plan), and in this case, military intervention. With the U.S. backed South Vietnam suffering from Sihanouk's policy of semi-toleration, this was a necessary step for the world power to establish its sphere of influence in the region.

The Khmer Republic suffered from weak governance, corruption, economic collapse, and widespread civilian displacement, exacerbated by U.S. bombing campaigns targeting North Vietnamese forces in rural Cambodia. The Khmer Rouge (Communist Party of Kampuchea, CPK) capitalized on this instability, portraying itself as a nationalist force resisting foreign intervention and corruption, and gained support from the rural populace during the Cambodian Civil War (1970–1975). With additional backing from North Vietnam, China, and Prince Sihanouk's endorsement in exile, the CPK captured Phnom Penh in April 1975, abolishing existing political, economic, and social institutions and establishing a radical agrarian communist system.

After the French defeat in 1954, Vietnam was divided under the Geneva Accords. North Vietnam, led by Ho Chi Minh, aimed to reunify the country under a communist government with support from the Soviet Union and China, while the U.S. backed South Vietnam. The Vietnam War, a proxy conflict, drew in multiple international powers and destabilized the region, including Cambodia. In April 1975, just 13 days after the CPK captured Phnom Penh, North Vietnamese forces entered Saigon, reunifying the country as the Socialist Republic of Vietnam under a centralized communist government, reducing the U.S. sphere of influence in the region and tarnishing its reputation in the global community.

After reunification, Vietnam sought to stabilize its borders while asserting regional influence, particularly in Indochina. However, historical grievances, including territorial disputes over Kampuchea Krom, the Brévié Line, and legacies of the Siamese–Vietnamese Wars, fueled Cambodian hostility. From 1975 to 1978, frequent border skirmishes and incursions shifted Vietnam's view of the Khmer Rouge from a potential ally to a direct threat.

The Cold War internationalized these historically rooted tensions. The Sino-Soviet Split fractured the communist bloc, turning Cambodia into a battleground for competing visions of socialist leadership in Asia. Soviet support emboldened Vietnam to act decisively, while Chinese backing of the Khmer Rouge insulated the regime

diplomatically despite its atrocities. Beijing perceived a united, pro-Soviet Vietnam as a threat to its influence, and turned their support away from the state after the Vietnam War.

Along with this, centuries of territorial loss and fears of foreign domination influenced Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge to adopt radical policies. These included aggressive militarization, border attacks on Vietnam, and internal purges, which created widespread fear and instability and set the stage for armed conflict with Vietnam.

Overall, Vietnam perceived Democratic Kampuchea not only as a security threat due to persistent border attacks, but also as a chaotic, destabilizing force aligned with China against Vietnamese and Soviet interests. Vietnam's intervention in Cambodia in December 1978 thus reflected both immediate security concerns and broader strategic objectives, including the desire to consolidate its role as a dominant regional power aligned with the Soviet bloc. Similarly, the Khmer Rouge perceived Vietnam not only as an immediate military threat due to historical territorial disputes and Vietnamese presence near Cambodian borders, but also as an expansionist force seeking regional dominance under Soviet patronage. From the perspective of Democratic Kampuchea, Vietnam's growing influence in Indochina represented an existential challenge to Cambodian sovereignty and autonomy. The Khmer Rouge's confrontational policies and militarization were therefore framed as defensive measures aimed at preserving national independence, resisting perceived Vietnamese hegemony, and safeguarding their revolutionary project from external control.

Prior to the outbreak of the Cambodian-Vietnamese War in 1978, the role of the United Nations and other international organizations in alleviating tensions was limited and largely ineffective. Throughout the mid-1970s, Cold War divisions and the principle of state sovereignty discouraged direct involvement in bilateral disputes. Despite reports of widespread human rights abuses and mass killings under the Khmer Rouge regime surfacing, Democratic Kampuchea maintained its diplomatic recognition at the United Nations, allowing the regime to shield itself from formal scrutiny or intervention. Furthermore, the UN did not deploy peacekeeping missions or investigative bodies to Cambodia during this period, nor did it impose sanctions or authorize collective action. The Khmer Rouge's isolationism prevented international access, while China's support and the Sino-Soviet rivalry blocked consensus in the Security Council, preventing coordinated action. As a result, allegations of genocide and border violence failed to translate into coordinated international pressure.

Other regional entities suffered to respond to the crisis accordingly. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), while increasingly concerned about instability in Indochina, focused primarily on preserving regional sovereignty and preventing Vietnamese expansion rather than directly addressing Khmer Rouge actions. Humanitarian agencies and NGOs were excluded from Cambodia, limiting their ability to provide relief on the ground. Overall, diplomatic efforts to de-escalate border tensions between Cambodia and Vietnam remained informal, fragmented, and insufficient to prevent armed confrontation, reflecting political paralysis and the

prioritization of sovereignty and Cold War alignment over human rights and conflict prevention throughout the global community during this time.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

Vietnam (Socialist Republic of Vietnam)

Prior to the outbreak of full-scale war, Vietnam increasingly perceived Democratic Kampuchea as a serious security threat due to repeated cross-border skirmishes and escalating hostility along the frontier. Officially, Vietnam emphasized its right to self-defense and expressed concern over instability emanating from Cambodia. Vietnam also viewed the Khmer Rouge's alignment with China as strategically dangerous, particularly in the context of the Sino-Soviet Split. In practice, Vietnam undertook military preparations and diplomatic efforts aimed at neutralizing what it saw as a hostile regime on its western border.

Democratic Kampuchea / Khmer Rouge

Democratic Kampuchea viewed Vietnam as a historically expansionist power seeking to dominate Indochina. Official rhetoric portrayed Vietnam as a threat to Cambodian sovereignty and revolutionary independence, justifying militarization and border actions as defensive measures. The Khmer Rouge's leadership rejected diplomatic engagement with Vietnam and pursued an aggressive nationalist agenda rooted in historical grievances and ideological rigidity. These actions significantly heightened tensions and reduced prospects for peaceful resolution.

People's Republic of China

China opposed Vietnam's growing regional influence and viewed Hanoi as an extension of Soviet power in Southeast Asia. Officially, China framed its support for Democratic Kampuchea in terms of sovereignty and opposition to intervention. In practice, China provided political backing and military assistance to the Khmer Rouge as a means of counterbalancing Soviet-aligned Vietnam and preserving its strategic position in Indochina.

Soviet Union (USSR)

The Soviet Union regarded Vietnam as a key ally and supported its security concerns regarding Cambodia. Officially, the USSR emphasized regional stability and the legitimacy of Vietnam's concerns over border security. Strategically, Soviet support for Vietnam reflected broader Cold War competition with China and efforts to expand Soviet influence in Southeast Asia. This backing reinforced Vietnam's confidence in confronting Democratic Kampuchea.

United States

In the period leading up to the conflict, the United States viewed developments in Indochina primarily through the lens of Cold War containment, despite having withdrawn militarily from Vietnam. Officially, the U.S. expressed concern over regional instability and the spread of Soviet influence. In practice, the United States opposed Vietnam's growing dominance in Indochina and remained wary of actions that could strengthen the Soviet bloc, even while acknowledging reports of internal repression within Cambodia.

France

France adopted a cautious and balanced approach to the Cambodian–Vietnamese conflict. As the former colonial power in Indochina, France emphasized respect for state sovereignty and supported peaceful resolution through diplomacy rather than military action. While concerned about growing humanitarian issues and regional instability, France favored UN-led mediation, ceasefire efforts, and limited humanitarian access, avoiding direct involvement that could escalate the conflict or revive perceptions of colonial interference.

ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations)

ASEAN member states were increasingly alarmed by rising tensions between Vietnam and Cambodia, fearing that conflict would undermine regional stability. Officially, ASEAN emphasized non-intervention, sovereignty, and peaceful resolution of disputes. At the same time, ASEAN states closely monitored Vietnam's military posture and sought diplomatic avenues to prevent escalation and limit external great-power influence in Southeast Asia. However, ASEAN's reluctance to directly condemn the Khmer Rouge stemmed from fears that Vietnamese intervention would legitimize external dominance in Southeast Asia.

Timeline of Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

Date	Event
1841–1845	Siamese–Vietnamese Wars - Vietnamese and Siamese intervention in Cambodia entrenches long-term Cambodian fears of foreign domination, particularly from Vietnam to the East. These historical grievances later shape Khmer Rouge nationalism and anti-Vietnamese ideology.
October 17, 1887	French Indochina Established - France consolidates control over Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, centralizing administration and laying the groundwork for future border disputes.
January 31, 1939	Brévié Line Established - French colonial administrator Jules Brévié draws an internal administrative boundary between Cambodia and Vietnam, particularly affecting islands and coastal zones. Though not intended as an international border, it later became a major source of post-independence disputes.

December 5, 1951	Kampuchean People's Revolutionary Party Established - While also being a communist organization, during the Cold War it allied itself with Vietnam and the Soviet Union, in contrast to the pro-Chinese Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK) led by Pol Pot.
July 21, 1954	Ratification of Geneva Accords - The Geneva Accords ended the First Indochina War, granting independence to Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam, and temporarily dividing Vietnam at the 17th parallel. The agreements left border issues unresolved and failed to establish lasting regional security mechanisms.
April 24, 1941	First Reign of Prince Norodom Sihanouk Begins - Following selection from French colonial authorities, the prince begins his first reign.
November 1, 1955	Start of the Vietnam War - During the War, Cambodia pursued a policy of neutrality while tolerating Viet Cong and PAVN presence within its borders, undermining sovereignty and increasing internal instability.
September 30, 1960	Communist Party of Kampuchea Established - Following a secret congress in Phnom Penh, where it was initially named the Worker's Party of Kampuchea (WPK)
1965–1973	U.S. Bombing Campaigns in Cambodia - U.S. military operations targeting North Vietnamese forces in Cambodia cause widespread displacement and economic collapse in rural regions, contributing to radicalization and the rise of the Khmer Rouge.
March 11, 1967	Cambodian Civil War Begins - The Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK) launched its first attacks against Prince Norodom Sihanouk's government, later targeting the Khmer Republic, marking the start of the Cambodian Civil War. This internal conflict weakened state authority and set the stage for the Khmer Rouge's rise and future cross-border tensions with Vietnam.
March 18, 1970	Coup d'état by General Lon Nol - The National Assembly voted unanimously to remove Prince Norodom Sihanouk as Chief of State, establishing the U.S. backed Khmer Republic.
April 17, 1975	Fall of Phnom Penh - The Khmer Rouge seizes Phnom Penh and establishes Democratic Kampuchea, immediately dismantling state institutions and initiating radical social restructuring. This marked the end of the Cambodian Civil War.
April 30, 1975	Fall of Saigon - North Vietnamese forces capture Saigon, reunifying Vietnam under a communist government and significantly shifting the balance of power in Indochina. This marked the end of the Vietnam War.
April 1975	UN Recognition of Democratic Kampuchea - Despite growing reports of mass killings, Democratic Kampuchea retains Cambodia's seat at the United Nations, shielding the regime from formal international scrutiny.
May 3-10, 1975	Attacks on Phu Quoc and Tho Chu Islands - Khmer Rouge forces attack

	Vietnamese territory, killing over 500 civilians, marking the first major escalation of Cambodian–Vietnamese hostilities.
August 5-8, 1977	Joint Communique of the Second ASEAN Heads of Government Meeting - ASEAN leaders emphasized cooperation based on respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity, and non-interference in internal affairs, and discussed improved relations with Indochinese states including Cambodia and Vietnam. This meeting took place in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. This communique did not directly condemn Khmer Rouge actions
April 18, 1978	Ba Chúc Massacre - Khmer Rouge forces massacre over 3,000 Vietnamese civilians in An Giang Province, becoming a turning point that solidified Vietnam's perception of Democratic Kampuchea as an existential threat.

Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

United Nations Diplomatic Recognition and Reporting

Before the outbreak of open conflict, the United Nations maintained diplomatic recognition of Democratic Kampuchea despite reports of widespread human rights abuses and mass killings under the Khmer Rouge. Multiple UN bodies, including the General Assembly and the Human Rights Commission, received reports from diplomats and NGOs documenting atrocities, but the UN did not take decisive action. Efforts were limited to verbal condemnations and informal diplomatic engagement, such as discussions and reporting by the U.N. Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR, replaced by UNHRC in 2006) on the situation in Cambodia and exchanges between UN envoys and Cambodian representatives regarding border tensions and humanitarian concerns, though these discussions failed to prompt decisive action. Constrained by the principle of state sovereignty and Cold War divisions within the Security Council, these measures failed to prevent continued border attacks on Vietnam or address internal repression, effectively leaving the situation unresolved and allowing tensions to escalate. Overall, UN interference failed to make a significant impact due to Cold War polarization within the Security Council, its strict adherence to state sovereignty and non-intervention, the lack of reliable access and information, and the absence of effective enforcement mechanisms to deter aggression.

Bilateral Warnings and Border Negotiations Between Vietnam and Cambodia

Before the war, Vietnam attempted direct engagement with Democratic Kampuchea through warnings, border negotiations, and military defensive measures to deter Khmer Rouge incursions. Hanoi communicated concerns over repeated attacks on border villages and sought assurances from Phnom Penh that aggression would cease. These efforts, however, were ignored or dismissed by the Khmer Rouge leadership, who persisted in perceiving Vietnam as a regional threat. Consequently, these attempts at conflict resolution were ineffective, as Khmer leadership often used diplomatic engagement to buy time for further military preparation, along with the

ideological rigidity of the Khmer Rouge and their strong backing from the People's Republic of China, which reduced any incentive for compromise.

ASEAN's Regional Diplomatic Efforts from 1975 to 1978

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) monitored regional instability in Indochina closely, and expressed concern over Khmer Rouge aggression along the Cambodian–Vietnamese border. ASEAN emphasized the importance of maintaining state sovereignty and discouraging Vietnamese expansionism. Its efforts included issuing statements condemning border violations and attempting to coordinate diplomatic pressure on both Vietnam and Cambodia. This included issuing joint communiqués expressing concern over regional instability without directly condemning the Khmer Rouge, various Thailand–Vietnam discussions from 1976 to 1978 on the topics of refugee flows and border militarization, and ASEAN members lobbying at the United Nations. However, ASEAN's measures were largely symbolic, lacked enforcement mechanisms, and were hindered by the bloc's internal diversity and limited capacity to intervene militarily or economically. As a result, while ASEAN raised awareness of potential conflict, it did little to condemn Khmer Rouge provocations or reduce cross-border violence, and was focused more on countering the perceived expansionist values of Vietnam.

Possible Solutions

As a Security Council, delegates are reminded that this committee possesses significant authority under the UN Charter. Security Council resolutions are legally binding on all Member States and require at least nine affirmative votes, including the concurrence of all five permanent members, each of whom holds veto power. As such, any proposed action must be politically feasible within the context of Cold War dynamics, and consistent with the principle of state sovereignty that dominated international relations during this time period.

Here are some key questions for consideration:

- Given repeated cross-border attacks between Democratic Kampuchea and Vietnam, what role could the Security Council have played in de-escalating border violence without violating the principle of non-intervention? Would border monitoring, mediation, or fact-finding missions have been politically viable?
- With ASEAN's emphasis on regional stability and sovereignty, how could the Security Council have coordinated with regional actors without undermining their autonomy? What lessons can be drawn from previous UN–regional organization cooperation?
- In light of Vietnam's security concerns and repeated diplomatic warnings to Phnom Penh, could the Security Council have facilitated structured bilateral or multilateral negotiations? What mechanisms could have ensured compliance without direct military enforcement?

- In response to the Ba Chúc Massacre (1978) and earlier cross-border attacks, could the Security Council have authorized an investigation or fact-finding mission without escalating the conflict? What political obstacles would such a proposal have faced?
- Following Vietnam's reunification in April 1975, what preventive diplomatic steps could the Security Council realistically have taken to address growing Cambodian–Vietnamese border tensions before they escalated into open warfare?
- Given the use of disputed territories such as Kampuchea Krom and areas near the Brévié Line as justifications for aggression, could the Security Council have played a role in clarifying borders or encouraging arbitration based on colonial-era agreements?
- How did the Sino-Soviet Split limit the Security Council's ability to act collectively, and what types of resolutions or statements might have been feasible without triggering vetoes from permanent members?
- How might've the principle of state sovereignty been balanced against growing evidence of mass atrocities in Cambodia, given the international norms and precedents of the late 1970s?

Delegates are expected to ground their proposals in the existing diplomatic realities, alliances, and international norms of the late 1970s. Effective solutions will balance legality, political feasibility, and regional stability, recognizing that the Security Council's strength lies not only in enforcement, but also in prevention, signaling, and legitimacy.

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Appendix or Appendices

- I. Why did Communist Vietnam invade Communist Cambodia?:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YBZMS1PThk>
- II. Introduction to the Cold War:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NF3u8Ju9aAg>
- III. The forgotten war between Vietnam and the Khmer Rouge:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hp_KMV97jUs