

CHAPTER 25

Hosting Prime Minister Hun Sen
in Washington

A second visit to Cambodia, poetic advice delivered to Vietnam, boycotting China, devising a method—which seems to have been adopted—of breaking the Cambodian deadlock, a third visit to Cambodia, and, finally, a great success in the hosting of Prime Minister Hun Sen in Washington.

By the beginning of 1990, we had played a fundamental role in Cambodian affairs in three ways: in catalyzing a successful campaign to prevent lethal aid to Prince Sihanouk; in exposing the full extent of U.S. covert assistance to Sihanouk and Son Sann; and in organizing a small political resistance in Washington to work on preventing the return of the Khmer Rouge.

But nothing had really changed. Cambodia was like the core of a mobile that was constantly fluttering in response to the movement of outside larger powers. In the outer ring were the largest states: China, Russia, and the United States, with France trying to play a role as well. In the next ring, there were the regional states: the members of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) like Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand, and, outside ASEAN, Vietnam and Australia. And, finally, there were four factions inside Cambodia. There probably was no more complicated political situation in the world. Looked at up close, it was kaleidoscopic, fascinating, ever-changing, and enormously colorful. It made European affairs seem duller than dishwater. But it also meant that FAS was a very minor actor even at its most effective. What to do?

“EVERY MAN SHOULD TRY”

I was working really hard. I could taste defeat and Khmer Rouge victory. I decided to return to Cambodia in January 1990 and saw with indescribable relief that Phnom Penh still seemed serene and peaceful. In fact, nothing had happened yet! But it easily could have. Later, when I met with the Vietnamese foreign minister, Nguyen Co Thach, he confided that the military of both Hanoi and Phnom Penh had expected, after the Vietnamese withdrawal, to lose 30 percent of Cambodia but had lost only 10 percent.

According to a Russian proverb, “On the first visit to a country, one’s eyes open, and on the second visit, one sees.” This certainly was true for me. I met with Hun Sen; a cousin of Prince Sihanouk’s, Princess Lydia Sisowat; the brother of Pol Pot; former prime minister In Tam of the Lon Nol government; the Cambodian defense minister; and a U.S.-trained deputy prime minister trying to run the economy.

The president of Vietnam’s Academy of Sciences, Nguyen Van Hieu, suggested that after visiting Cambodia, I should come to Hanoi to meet with Premier Do Muoi and Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach. Since Vietnam is an ethnic offshoot of China, I decided to go with the flow and incorporate my advice to Vietnam in a poem. Without telling Nguyen Van Hieu what I was doing, I demanded that Hanoi provide me with an English-speaking poet. And, laboring for five hours, the poet-translator, Nguyen Gia Lap (a third of the population of Vietnam is named Nguyen, pronounced “win”), turned my poem into Vietnamese. It is larded with a certain amount of soft soap.

The Vietnamese
A Great Nation
Trapped
In a Small Country
Size Attracts Invaders
Vietnamese Dare to Resist
They Win Wars

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*Lose Friends
Wonder Why
In Ancient Times
They Apologize
For Their Courage
Today They Are
Too Proud to Lie
Not Just One but Two
Superpowers Are Resentful
Ungrateful Says One
Too Clever Says the Other
China Will Change
Before Vietnam
America Will Not
Find the Defeated
Ask Their Help
Psychological Jujitsu
Is Not Weakness
Ask Your Ancestors
Why Not Practice
What You Preach
Will Not Prosperity
Come Faster
From Saving Face
What Emperor Sulks
In New Jersey
What President Saw
The Famous Victory
In America
Who Lost Limbs
Only Those Who Lost
Care Who Won
Who Else Can Forgive
With Oriental Care*

"EVERY MAN SHOULD TRY"

Design a Ceremony
Heal the Hearts
But the Personality of a Nation
Is Its Fate
Do As You Will
Perhaps You Cannot
Will as You Will
The Price of Pride
Is Patience
There Is Another Road
To Both Prosperity and Peace
Relax Rules of All Kinds
Get Rich, Win Friends
All At Once
Only Vietnam
Can Decide
In Any Case
Your Future Is Great

The Vietnamese officials were startled and pleased to see the poetic effort, and they informed me that on each Tet, Ho Chi Minh had given his advice to the Vietnamese in the form of a poem. The Vietnamese asked for the right to print my poem and circulate it to the Central Committee but decided, in the end, not to print it because they thought it would offend the Chinese. The notion of relaxing rules and getting rich was consistent with the preference of Do Muoi and must have played well in the internal power struggle there at the time.

Direct scientific exchange with Vietnam was still impossible to organize within U.S. government regulations, so I suggested we receive one of Nguyen Van Hieu's people in our FAS office for a year to study issues of scientific exchange; I chose the forty-seven-year-old Nguyen Huynh Mai, a mature, relaxed, and considerate woman. Mai passed a useful and pleasant year with us.

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Having boycotted Russia over the issue of Andrei Sakharov, I had now reached the point of boycotting China over its support of the Khmer Rouge and over its restrictions on student travel to America. Back in Washington, I wrote Premier Li Peng on February 9, 1990, and said I would not attend a disarmament meeting in China, and was already boycotting Chinese embassy receptions, over China's support of the Khmer Rouge. Li Peng was the adopted stepson of Premier Zhou Enlai, and I made much of the fact that I had loved Zhou and felt that Li had departed from Zhou's path.^[442]

At a February 13 press briefing, I released a set of five documents showing "Sihanouk Forces Fighting in Cooperation with Khmer Rouge."⁴⁴³ In May I released a list of thirty-six scientists, including eighteen Nobel Prize winners, who called on all persons and governments to stop assisting the Khmer Rouge.⁴⁴⁴ One did not have to be an expert on Cambodia to know that helping the Khmer Rouge did not make sense.

Seizing the opportunity of a request for lectures in Australia, I went there for ten days, October 19-29, 1990, to see what that government was thinking. Australia had played a pivotal role in this struggle ever since late 1989, when the minister for foreign affairs and trade, Gareth Evans, introduced a Solarz plan for a UN "trusteeship" in Cambodia to be followed by free elections. By the time I arrived, the Australian government had been working heroically and tirelessly for a year to make the plan work. But under the surface there was a general feeling among Australian experts that the Khmer people were just too fractious. Some wanted to wash their hands of the whole affair and just recognize the Hun Sen government.

May 20, 1991, was the seventieth anniversary of Sakharov's birth, and I attended a gala celebration in Moscow. Elena Bonner presided. Alexander Dubcek gave a message from President Havel of Czechoslovakia. President Gorbachev and his wife, Raisa, attended, along with such advisers as Yevgeny Primakov, who had tried to settle the Iraqi war; Y. A. Ossipyan, his scientific adviser;

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Guriy Marchuk, the president of the Soviet Academy of Sciences; and so on. Boris Yeltsin was there also. I seized the occasion to visit the Soviet Foreign Ministry, and there, on May 22, I met with Sergei Sergevich Razov, the director of the Division of Far Eastern and Indochinese Affairs under the deputy foreign minister, Rogochev. He knew of my previous meeting with Rogochev, and we had a very good meeting.

At this time, the plan of the five permanent members of the UN for Cambodia (the "Perm 5 Plan") was having a rough time. The Permanent 5 Plan was to turn over Cambodian sovereignty to a Supreme National Council (SNC) of the four contending factions—which would be given the UN seat then held by the Khmer Rouge—and which could act by consensus with a view to holding elections.

I told Razov something I had learned from Herman Kahn: Chickens will peck at a fence forever if they see food on the other side without stopping to see if there's a way around the fence. Dogs, more restless and more intelligent, will break off and look around. Why not, then, relax the pressure from the Perm 5 and let the factions try to work it out? I outlined my thoughts. And he added, "And let the Perm 5 draft agreement be tabled without being rejected."

"Yes," I said. In the end, he agreed to try this out on the Chinese, and I agreed to write to Gareth Evans in Australia. It was high-level maneuvering, and I was exhilarated.

Immediately on returning home on May 29, I wrote to the Australian Foreign Ministry, urging a strategy of "transposition." I outlined these points:

- (a) The present emphasis on talks between the Perm 5 members would now shift to emphasis on talks between the Cambodian factions on which the main responsibility for agreement would be seen to rest.
- (b) The present emphasis on pressuring the Cambodian factions to agree to an existing draft would shift to emphasis on relaxing such

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pressures—with a view to giving each faction the confidence with which to seek agreement with the others.

- (c) The Perm 5 draft agreement would be tabled without being rejected. [Razov's point]

I included the chicken-dog story and said, "Perhaps the time has come to try stepping back." I called the Australian embassy and arranged with the first secretary, Stephen Kentwell, to see that this got to Australia pronto. I wrote and told Razov what I had done.^[445] A few months later, the Chinese foreign minister, Qian Quchen, was telling the Japanese government that it was "time for Cambodian chefs to make Cambodian cuisine, not foreign cooks" and that "modifications are possible" in the plan of the great powers. And in a detailed and thoughtful letter of August 8, Foreign Minister Gareth Evans responded to my letter of May 29. He wrote, "As you will know, since you wrote there has been a fundamental and positive shift in the peace process. This shift has, in fact, been in the direction you suggest." This confirmed a much earlier comment from the startled Australian first secretary, who had passed on my letter to Evans: "They have taken your proposal."

Because of the Chinese change of mood and of the decision to let the factions talk it out, the SNC became operational and decided to locate its headquarters in Phnom Penh. This opened, in turn, a possibility for governments to open embassies in Phnom Penh in recognition of the SNC, if not the Hun Sen government. We had urged this on several governments.^[446] Australia promptly announced it would do so, and several others followed; certainly they thought of this themselves, but by prodding them all, we may have helped start the stampede.

By 1991 the embargo had dropped off to the point where one could fly directly from Bangkok to Phnom Penh rather than through Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam, and the plane flew so low that one could see the B-52 bomb craters left throughout Cambodia. There was euphoria in the city about the impending return of

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Prince Sihanouk, who had been in exile since 1974. Everyone wanted a new beginning. Sihanouk was saying, “Hun Sen is more liberal than I was,” and they were working well together. Indeed Hor Namhong and Hun Sen had traveled with the prince to Pyongyang to meet with Kim Il Sung and were, indeed, invited to come to China on July 24–26, which excited them both.

Formation of the Genocide Project

On this next trip I took along an American University professor, Gregory Stanton, an anthropologist with experience in Africa and in Cambodia. He had two adopted Cambodian children. One was the first adopted immediately after the Vietnamese forces arrived to find the Khmer Rouge had devastated the country; Stanton and his wife were refugee workers, and someone had left the child on a doorstep. During the trip, realizing that there were a few, but only a few, Cambodians left who had personal contact with the top dozen Khmer Rouge officials, we conceived the idea of a “Genocide Witness Project” to interview them.

We secured a letter of July 11 from the foreign minister, Hor Namhong, authorizing the investigation. It stated, “The State of Cambodia agrees to permit you to organize, in Cambodia, historical investigation into the high-level responsibility for the Cambodian genocide, including especially the taking of oral histories of conversations with, and speeches by, top level Khmer Rouge leaders. We consider this project to be important to better understanding the genocide in Cambodia and, above all, to preventing any repetition of this historical tragedy.” This was the genesis of the Cambodian Genocide Program now being run at Yale University by Ben Kiernan and funded by a State Department grant.

By the fall of 1991, the Permanent 5 plan had gone so far that I decided to write Solarz a letter on November 13, throwing my support behind the funding of it.⁴⁴⁷ His astonished response to my

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“utterly unexpected, but very welcome letter” said it “meant a lot” that I would throw my “not inconsiderable weight” behind this plan. And he said he would welcome any thoughts I might have, from time to time, about how to enhance it.⁴⁴⁸

At a mid-January meeting at the Carter Center in Atlanta, when I was asked by one participant what I was going to do next, I had the most important brainstorm of the Cambodian period: Why not invite Hun Sen to Washington? The timing was perfect because the issue of funding the Cambodian peace plan, discussed in my earlier correspondence with Solarz, would be on the floor of the House.

This hosting notion began, really, with my invitation to Ambassador Hor Namhong in 1988. To get that rolling, I had organized supporting letters to the secretary of state from the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (Senator Pell) and from the chairman of the relevant Senate subcommittee (Senator Cranston).⁴⁴⁹ And I had organized an invitation for him to speak at the Council on Foreign Relations. It would be a private but important visit, and the ambassador’s agreement was received on March 20.

The State Department resisted the idea. The department’s first defense was that there had been no visa application.⁴⁵⁰ And when he did apply, the State Department announced that his visit “would have serious adverse foreign policy consequences.”⁴⁵¹ We asked the ACLU to file suit. According to two appellate decisions, only spies, traitors, and saboteurs could be denied entry. The State Department had no legal authority to take this position.

By September 1991 State had grudgingly granted permission to Hor Namhong to visit Washington for a day or two, as a detour during a visit to the UN in New York. And so we had had the pleasure of hosting him, and he met with Senator Cranston and a group of specialists at the Council on Foreign Relations. It was thus natural to think of hosting Prime Minister Hun Sen next. It seemed difficult but it might work.

By January 30 I had rounded up the usual suspects to provide me with the invitations. Senator Cranston said he would meet with the

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prime minister if he were in Washington—the formulation senators use so that they can avoid actually inviting the person *to* Washington—and his letter stated, “Especially because the Senate will be voting this Spring on funding of the U.N. peace plan, I anticipate that interest in getting your opinion on this plan would be high.” And the Council on Foreign Relations extended the same invitation to Hun Sen that it had extended, earlier, to Hor Namhong.

By this time, the United States, like Australia and others, had seized the opportunity to send an official to Cambodia in the guise of a representative to the Supreme National Council of all four factions—not to the working government of Prime Minister Hun Sen, which actually controlled the country. Thus the United States had a mission and a chief of mission, Charles Twining, in place.

As I understand it, Hun Sen had shown the letters to Twining, and Twining had recommended acceptance—hence a visa would be available. Thus FAS became the host for Hun Sen’s first visit to the United States. The State Department even agreed, at my request, to provide diplomatic protection.

I flew to Chicago to meet Hun Sen’s plane and to discuss his itinerary on the flight to Washington. He had brought his wife and seven others. We had written an “appreciation” of his career for distribution at various events. My goal was to ensure that America saw him much as the *1990 Current Biography Yearbook* had described him:

The leader of that government is Hun Sen, a young and gifted, though uneducated, former guerrilla who in the past decade has metamorphosed from being a diffident puppet of the Vietnamese Communists, lacking even a basic understanding of world affairs, into a confident and articulate nationalist who rivals the venerable prince Norodom Sihanouk in popularity among the seven million people of Cambodia.⁴⁵²

For openers I had prepared a kind of poem on a plaque for Hun Sen to leave at the Tomb of the Unknowns in Arlington National

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Cemetery. America was consumed, at that time, with a completely phony campaign on behalf of American soldiers who were missing in action in Vietnam and supposedly might still be alive *after twenty years*. One hundred of these missing were missing in Cambodia.

But *every* Cambodian family was an MIA family, with missing loved ones unaccounted for. To make this point of shared despair, the plaque read:

TO THE HUNDRED MIA AMERICANS OF CAMBODIA
FROM THE MILLIONS OF CAMBODIAN FAMILIES
WHO ALSO LOST A RELATIVE
IN SOME CAMBODIAN PLACE
THEY KNOW NOT WHERE

The plaque caper almost failed at the outset. As we left Hun Sen's opening press conference, the armored vehicle in which we were riding screeched off from the curb (standard procedure, I was told) and left behind the rest of the delegation (they were not considered protected by State Department security). But they were carrying the plaque, and the guards were unwilling to go back; they were, I think, hazing me because they considered the whole thing a commie-pinko operation. The plaque and the others arrived only minutes before we needed to lay it at the tomb. But it read well in the next day's newspapers. I was *very* happy.

During this week, Hun Sen was everywhere, in accordance with our carefully planned itinerary. In Washington, besides his press conference, he addressed the Asia Society, the Center for International and Strategic Studies (CISS), the NGO Forum, and the Council on Foreign Relations. He met with officials of the Center for National Policy, chaired by Muskie and with its president, Madeline Albright, now secretary of state, and including some key senators. He met with Cranston and the Democratic majority leader, George Mitchell. He lunched with Stephen Solarz and also with the editorial board of *The Washington Post*. He breakfasted

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Hun Sen during the Washington visit with George McGovern, left, and William Colby, right

with the *Washington Times* editorial board and also met for breakfast with William Colby and George McGovern.

The State Department finally decided to have him to dinner, and he also met with the undersecretary of state for political affairs. He visited the White House and met with the deputy national security adviser, Admiral Jonathan T. Howe. And he

met with General John W. Vessey Jr., special emissary for MIA and POW affairs. In a special trip to New York, he met the secretary general of the United Nations, addressed the Asia Society for lunch, and met with the editorial board of *The Wall Street Journal*.

Everywhere he was cool and often humorous. I fed him jokes for openers—but he improved on them. For a provincial from far-off rural Cambodia, he certainly was poised. At *The Wall Street Journal*, he told them he knew he was “at the heart of capitalism.” For a former Khmer Rouge, the most left-wing of Communists, he sure had come a long way.

On March 25, halfway into the visit, *The New York Times* ran an article headlined “Cambodia Chief, a Communist Survivor, Is Welcomed in U.S.” It stated, “In the Administration and Congress, there is an increasing sense that the young Prime Minister has evolved into a statesman.” Imagine that; this was the person derided, until his visit, as a Vietnamese puppet, a Khmer Rouge with blood on his hands.

By Friday, *The Washington Post* had a piece headlined “Washington Sees a New Hun Sen.”⁴⁵³ The reporter wrote, “Many people who have watched him develop . . . describe him as a complicated, pragmatic, highly skilled politician who is sincere about lifting his people out of their poverty and is, like every other living Cambodian, a survivor.”

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A *Washington Post* editorial revealed how important FAS intervention was. Noting that Hun Sen was here to “encourage Americans to fund the U.N.’s plan,” it pointed out that the Bush administration had “hesitated to allow him an American forum” but had “finally” softened its position.⁴⁵⁴ This was clearly a case in which our invitation made all the difference.

Hun Sen left on March 28. On April 1 I cabled him in Paris, his next stop, saying, “House of Representatives passed Foreign Aid bill with \$270 million for six months to cover all U.S. peacekeeping operations. Senate approval seems imminent and certain. Congratulations. Many believe this might not have happened without you.”

It had cost us \$27,000, as I recall, to pay for his delegation’s round-the-world airfare and hotel fees in Washington. Only one foundation had contributed anything (only \$5,000) but it had been, perhaps, our most cost-effective operation.⁴⁵⁵

As the reader will recognize, I worked very hard on Cambodia and with great passion. Little would have been achieved without such intensity. By this measure, public interest activists cannot be hired but only discovered. Committed public interest activists who did not find the particular crisis of Cambodia fascinating and overwhelmingly important could not have penetrated so far into the workings of the crisis. This means that public interest activists cannot be “deployed” by funders or others but must deploy themselves into areas that grip their imagination.

In working on Cambodia, I realized also the pleasures of working on an issue that was *not* being worked on by everyone and his brother. By contrast, my work on the U.S.-Soviet arms race involved milling about with a large number of other actors. The one clear thing about Cambodian studies was that few indeed knew much about them. And, also, I learned it was not that hard to become an expert, at least for policy purposes. All in all, Cambodia taught me that there was a world out there, beyond the arms race, of real people and blood and tears and of ongoing war and possible peace.

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The Cambodian election was held in 1992. Prince Rannaridh won by a significant though not overwhelming majority. Hun Sen's coalition complained about irregularities rather than give up all power, and a coalition government was formed with Rannaridh as first prime minister and Hun Sen second prime minister. An uneasy truce continued for five years as each side built up its forces. In July 1997, in a situation characterized by reciprocal fear of surprise attack, Rannaridh fled the country, and Hun Sen attacked and disarmed the opposition. Hun Sen was roundly denounced for this coup, and the international community began trying to organize another election. In August of 1997, in an effort to determine what had happened, I returned to Cambodia and prepared a report published in the September *Public Interest Report*.

In the wake of the August 1997 visit, I sent a confidential message through a well-placed intermediary to the three leaders of the Hun Sen government: the acting chief of state, Chea Sim; the first prime minister, Ung Huot; and the second prime minister, Hun Sen. It made seven suggestions for improving governance and image but may have had no effect whatsoever.⁴⁵⁶

By April 1998 the Khmer Rouge had broken up and Pol Pot passed away. The situation was completely changed. Hun Sen was no longer the “main bulwark” against the Khmer Rouge, and would have to justify any support he might secure by showing that he could govern better than Prince Rannaridh. This is a much closer call than the one I made in supporting Hun Sen to a coalition containing the Khmer Rouge.

Hun Sen did win the election of 1998 in the eyes of international observers. Predictably for Cambodian politics, the losers, Rannaridh and Sam Rainsey, leader of the Khmer Nation Party, cried “foul” (as Hun Sen had cried foul in losing the previous election) and they refused to accept the results. They were in a position to veto the functioning of the government since the results required them to form a coalition to permit the parliament to function. It seemed, based on his actions and on private conversations, that

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Rainsey was unwilling to join such a coalition with Hun Sen under any circumstances and preferred to rally the international community (on the basis of one issue or another) to cut off aid to Cambodia until Hun Sen was forced out. In support of this strategy, he organized peaceful demonstrations and put pressure on Rannaridh to refuse to join in such a coalition, so that government could not function in Cambodia. Meanwhile, he organized demonstrations that would implicitly challenge Hun Sen to use violence, or make some other newsworthy mistake—much as Mahatma Gandhi had organized unrest against the British in India until they withdrew. The international community—having forced not just one free election but two, and having been, on the whole, satisfied with the second one—was now being encouraged by losing factions to force post-election reconciliation. Finally, in November 1988, with Rainsey out of the country, Prince Rannaridh and Hun Sen reached agreement on a governing coalition.

According to general indices of well-being, considering health, education, poverty, and so on, the only countries below Cambodia, with the exception of Nepal or Bhutan, are countries in black Africa. Cambodia is being held to higher standards of democracy than these, especially by conservatives in America, and may not be able to fulfill them. Considering the enmity between Cambodia's three parties, their different ways of doing business, and the various pressures of the different rings of countries around it, it was, as usual, very unclear in what direction Cambodia would drift.