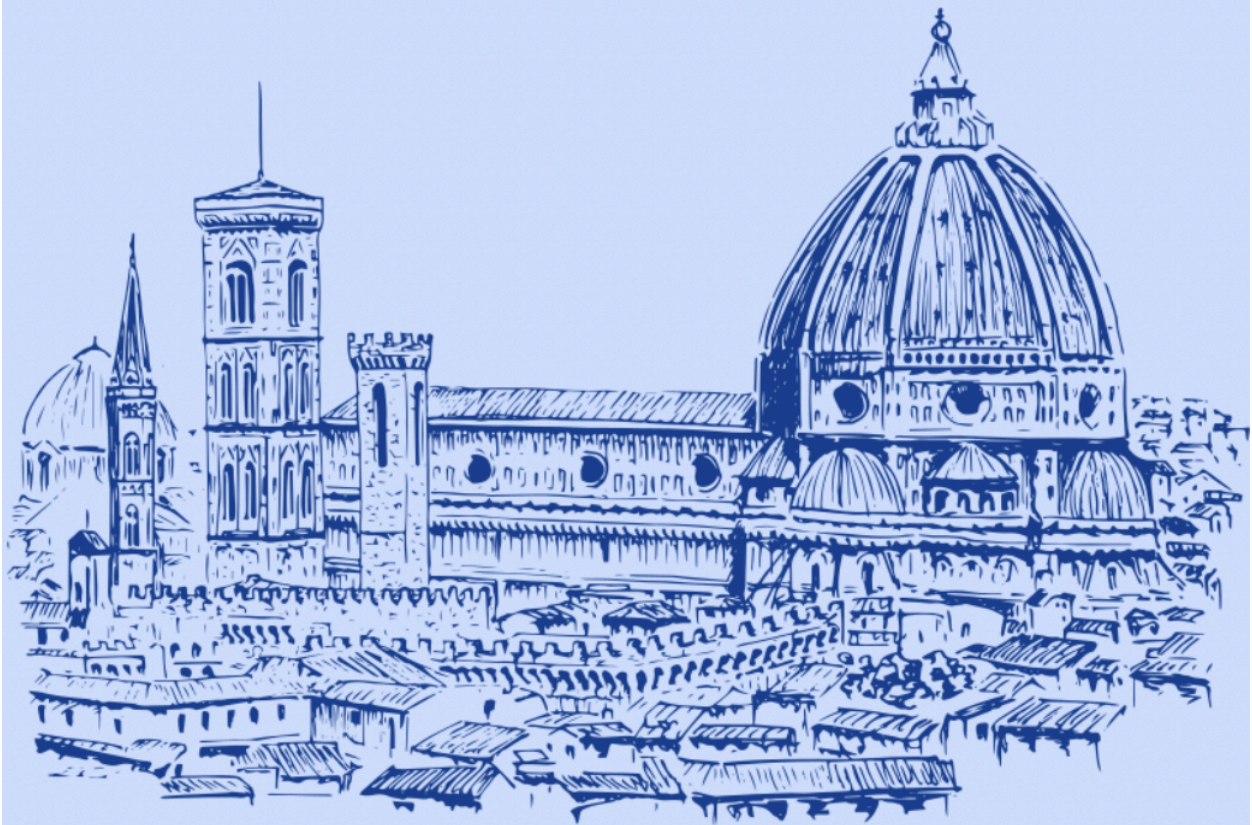


RESEARCH GUIDE

Historical



Louisa Eldridge
Raya Gupta



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Committee: Historical Security Council (HSC)

Topic: (2) The Cambodian Genocide and the Khmer Rouge (1 January, 1985)

Chairs: Raya Gupta, Louisa Eldridge

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I. Introduction

*A reminder to delegates that any information unavailable or events yet to occur on January 1st 1985 are not valid topics of debate and will not be considered by the committee. The research guide includes such information to give delegates a well-rounded view of the history, however delegates are expected to present information as if they were living in 1985.

The end of World War II was marred by battles fought by both the French and US against communism in Vietnam and Korea respectively. Cambodia gained its statehood out of these post-war struggles. It became independent in 1953 when the French lost control over Indochina due to defeat by the Viet Minh communist army. Cambodia's constitutional monarchy under Prince Sihanouk remained neutral during the Vietnam War. However, that did not end conflict and discontent within the country, especially from the Khmer Rouge, Cambodia's communist party formed in 1951 with backing from the Viet Minh. By the late 1950s the party's members were engaged in clandestine activities against the government of Prince Sihanouk, but for many years they made little headway against Sihanouk from their bases in remote jungle and mountain areas, partly because they had little luck inciting the peasant population to rebellion. Prince Sihanouk was a popular ruler among peasantry and the Khmer Rouge remained a fringe guerilla group until the Prince was ousted in 1970 by an American-backed right-wing coup. 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. Prince Sihanouk was forced to seek refuge in Beijing, but joined a political coalition with the Khmer Rouge who began to attract more support from the Cambodian countryside. Their cause was greatly aided when the United States initiated a bombing campaign in Cambodia in an attempt to suppress guerrilla activity. Cambodia's civil war ended in 1975 when capital city Phnom Penh fell to the Khmer Rouge who established a national government.

II. Definition of Key Terms

a) Genocide

There is an extremely high bar for violent acts to be considered genocide by international law. It is considered to be the deliberate killing of members of a particular nation or group with the purpose of destroying that nation or group.

b) Communism

An ideology that advocates class war to generate a society in which all property is publicly owned and each person works and is paid according to their abilities and needs. It is diametrically opposed to another dominant ideology of capitalism. The conflicting global expansion of both ideologies greatly exacerbated the tensions and proxy wars of the Cold War.

c) Guerilla warfare/tactics

Guerrilla warfare is a form of unconventional warfare in which small groups of irregular military—such as rebels, partisans, paramilitary personnel or armed civilians—use ambushes, sabotage, terrorism, raids, petty warfare or hit-and-run tactics in a rebellion, violent conflict, war or civil war to fight against regular military, police or rival insurgent forces. It seeks to avoid direct confrontation, usually due to inferior weapons and tactical capabilities.

d) Coup d'etat

An illegal attempt by military, political or other forces to defenestrate incumbent leadership.

III. General overview

Pol Pot, the leader of the Khmer Rouge declared 1975 to be “Year Zero” when Cambodia was to be reconstructed according to communist ideals and isolated from outside corrupting influences. The new regime destroyed evidence of Western influence, emptying cities and force-marching the urban population into the countryside to engage in doomed agricultural projects. Starvation and disease alone would have created a major humanitarian crisis. The Khmer Rouge based their policies on the idea that citizens of Cambodia had become corrupted by external influences, especially Vietnam and the capitalist West. They persecuted anyone who did not support them, designating any resisters to be “impure”. Within days of taking power, the regime killed thousands of military personnel and forced citizens into what they called reeducation schools, which were essentially places of state propaganda. The regime also forced families to live communally with other people, in order to destroy the family structure. Under the totalitarian regime, citizens had no rights and could be detained arbitrarily for meaningless offenses. Civil and political rights, private property, money, religious practices, minority languages, and foreign clothing were all disallowed. An enormous prison network was set up to enforce the new regulations. Within these prisons so-called “traitors” were held, tortured and killed. The most infamous of the prisons was located in the capital city of Phnom Penh, called Tuol Sleng or S-21. Of the roughly 17,000 men, women, and children who were brought to S-21 there were only about a dozen survivors. There were also rural sites for mass murder, referred to as the Killing Fields. A film called the Killing Fields came out in 1984, bringing the plight of Khmer Rouge victims to worldwide attention.

The Khmer Rouge targeted ethnic minorities, especially Chinese, Vietnamese, and Muslim Cham, of whom an estimated 80% were killed. In addition, anyone who was believed to be an intellectual was killed: doctors, lawyers, teachers, even people who wore glasses or knew a foreign language became targets. Specially targeted were the inhabitants of the areas close to the Vietnamese border. The genocide intensified throughout the 1970s, with the Khmer Rouge turning on itself and murdering thousands of suspected traitors and spies in its ranks. By November 1978, when Vietnam invaded and put an end to the Khmer Rouge’s regime, at least 1.25 million and as many as 3 million Cambodians had died as a result of Khmer Rouge action.

Within two weeks of the Vietnamese military intervention, the government had fled Phnom Penh for Thailand, and the Vietnamese had installed a puppet regime—called the People’s Republic of Kampuchea—consisting largely of Cambodian communists who had deserted Pol Pot in 1977–78. Under Vietnamese aid and expertise, private property was restored; schools reopened, and some Buddhist practices were reintroduced; cities were repopulated; and, with freedom of movement, internal trade flourished. At the same time, at least 500,000 Cambodians, including some 100,000 associated with the communists, fled to Thailand because of the hardship, uncertainty, and disorder that accompanied the installation of the new regime. The Khmer Rouge retreated to remote areas and resumed guerrilla warfare, this time operating from bases near the border with Thailand and obtaining aid from China. In 1982 an uneasy alliance was reached among the three groups opposing the Vietnamese-backed regime in Phnom Penh, and a government-in-exile was established with Sihanouk as president and Son Sann as prime minister. That government, despite recognition by the United Nations, received little support from Cambodians inside the country and was largely ineffectual.

The Khmer Rouge coalition carried on guerrilla warfare until 1991. The Khmer Rouge opposed the United Nations-sponsored peace settlement of 1991 and the multiparty elections in 1993, and they continued guerrilla warfare against the noncommunist coalition government formed after those elections. They held onto their United Nations seat until 1993 as well. Afterwards, isolated in the remote western provinces of the country and increasingly dependent on gem smuggling for their funding, the Khmer Rouge suffered a series of military defeats and grew weaker from year to year. In 1995 many of their cadres accepted an offer of amnesty from the Cambodian government, and in 1996 one of their leading figures, Ieng Sary, defected along with several thousand guerrillas under his command and signed a peace agreement with the government. The disarray within the organization intensified in 1997, when Pol Pot was arrested by other Khmer Rouge leaders and sentenced to life imprisonment. Pol Pot died in 1998, and soon afterward the surviving leaders of the Khmer Rouge defected or were imprisoned. The Khmer Rouge Tribunal (a joint operation between the UN and the Cambodian government) was established in 2006 with the aim of bringing former Khmer Rouge members to justice.

IV. Major Parties Involved and their Views

a) Vietnam

The Khmer Rouge initially had been trained by the Vietnamese, but from the early 1970s they had been resentful and suspicious of Vietnam and Vietnamese intentions. Scattered skirmishes between the two sides in 1975 had escalated into open warfare by the end of 1977. The policies of the Khmer Rouge led to a mass exodus of refugees to Vietnam which absorbed hundreds of thousands of Cambodian and ethnic Vietnamese refugees. The war and refugee influx disrupted Vietnam's rice bowl region and caused a serious food insecurity in the country. The Khmer Rouge under Pol Pot also aimed at extending their area by incorporating a large chunk of Vietnam. The Khmer Rouge conducted cross border raids into Vietnam, killing thousands of Vietnamese civilians and their leaders spoke openly of wanting to annex Vietnam. Domestically, massive purges sparked an uprising in the eastern zone of Cambodia. Rebels comprising defeated soldiers and others against the Khmer Rouge regrouped across the Vietnamese border and pleaded for help from Hanoi in 1978. Initially, the Vietnamese response was restrained as the Khmer Rouge had the support of China and Vietnam wanted to avoid a two-front war. In early 1978, Vietnam forces advanced and tried to negotiate with Pol Pot but he declined. So the Vietnamese invaded the country, overthrowing the Khmer Rouge and trying to initiate a period of greater stability to rebuild Cambodia's crippled systems and end its destabilization of the region. In 1985, Vietnamese forces were still occupying Cambodia.

b) Cambodia (Khmer Rouge government)

The Khmer Rouge government continued to represent the country at the UN until 1993. The Khmer Rouge opposed the Vietnamese imposed government of Cambodia and ran active military resistance against it from positions on the border with Thailand.

c) Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) / North Korea

King Norodom Sihanouk had a firmly knitted friendship with the founder of North Korea (DPRK) and long-time supreme leader Kim Il Sung. In 1974, a winter palace was built outside Pyongyang for the monarch and he sought refuge there for many years, bringing

back to Cambodia a personal troupe of North Korean bodyguards, whom he trusted more implicitly than their local counterparts. North Korea supported Sihanouk throughout his ups and downs with governance in Cambodia, allying with his allies.

d) China

China supported the Khmer Rouge both politically and militarily, even waging a small border war with Vietnam in 1979 to deter their invasion of Cambodia.

e) USA

Throughout the Khmer Rouge's reign, the United States denied the genocide was taking place. It supported the Khmer Rouge because Vietnam did not.

f) France

Cambodia was initially under French colonial rule. France layed low during Cambodia's time of strife, reestablishing diplomatic footing after 1991.

g) Thailand

Hundreds of thousands of people fled into Thailand from Cambodia both during the Khmer Rouge's time in power and in the aftermath that was marred by political unrest and civil war. Relations between Thailand and the Khmer Rouge were complicated and characterized by competing interests. Partnership was adopted cautiously and then rescinded in response to both external and internal factors. Despite its repetitive claim of neutrality, Bangkok became involved in the Cambodian conflict from the beginning. Its role was indeed significant to the diplomatic and military position of the guerilla forces of Pol Pot, as well as to the other two Cambodian opposition forces led by Prince Sihanouk and Son Sann. Although the atrocities committed by the Khmer Rouge were widely known, the Thai government's policy of backing them under the leadership of General Kriangsak received strong support from various political groups in Thailand by 1979. After Thailand's coup d'etat, relationships with Cambodia steadily improved. But although both Cambodia and Thailand had expressed their intention to revitalize ties, they failed to restore peace on their border.

h) The “Soviet Bloc”

As the news of Khmer Rouge atrocities spread, donations came mainly from the Soviet Bloc.

V. Past resolutions and/or treaties

Summary of UN activity

[The Spectre of the Khmer Rouge over Cambodia | United Nations](#): The United Nations did not intervene in the situation in Cambodia until after Vietnam invaded the country and revealed the atrocities committed by the Khmer Rouge. Even then, it was slow to act and did not have immediate success.

*Note to delegates, the following section is divided into two parts. Part 1 will detail the resolutions that have passed to the point of the date of the Security Council session that delegates are participating in and Part 2 will include actions taken by the UN and others after that date for a fuller historical context. Documents in Part 2 can not be referenced by delegates during debate as existant, but they may serve as inspiration for solutions to bring to the table.

1. Resolutions and documents that have passed before*:
 - a. [Universal Declaration of Human Rights | United Nations](#)
 - b. Geneva Convention
2. Resolutions and documents that have passed afterwards (which may not be referenced by delegates during debate as existent)*:
 - a. [UNSCR/RES/668](#)
 - b. [Paris Agreement](#)
 - c. [Agreement between the United Nations and the Royal Government of Cambodia concerning the prosecution under Cambodian law of crimes committed during the period of Democratic Kampuchea](#)
 - d. [Resolutions on Cambodia | OHCHR](#)

VI. Questions to consider

- How can we ensure that Cambodia recovers from years of totalitarian rule?
- How should we facilitate the reestablishment of true democratic institutions?
- Who can be held accountable for the Cambodian genocide?
- How do we hold those who are to blame accountable for their actions?
- How can diplomatic solutions be reached in a way that creates lasting peace?
- What infrastructure is needed to ensure lasting peace?
- What do the people of Cambodia most require?

VII. Conclusion

It is 1985. The atrocities of the Cambodian genocide are just coming to light internationally and the international community must respond. Polarization is high, the world is divided and not without violence. But this is human suffering on an unbelievable level and it is the responsibility of the UN—and its member states— to find meaningful solutions that both prevent Cambodia from plunging back into a dark place and bring justice to its suffering civilian population.

Personal interests rule foreign policy, as delegates that must be kept in mind, but good faith and greater good can not be laid aside in this forum. High quality debate and high quality ideas are expected to address this issue in a creative and multifaceted way. Do not be bound by history.

VIII. Bibliography

[Cambodia - Vietnamese Intervention, Khmer Rouge, Genocide | Britannica](#)

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[Vietnam's role in Cambodia 1978-1989: Elimination of Khmer Rouge](#)

[Thailand's Response to the Cambodian Genocide.](#)

[Cambodia's Triumph and Tragedy: The UN's Greatest Experiment 30 years on.](#)