

CHAPTER II

CONDITION, HISTORY, AND DOMESTIC POLITICS OF CAMBODIA

This chapter will elaborate the background condition of Cambodia. Firstly, this chapter will discuss the general condition of Cambodia. After that, the history of Cambodia from the Khmer Kingdom until modern Cambodia. Finally, this chapter will talk about the political system and the domestic politics of Cambodia which influence the foreign policy of Cambodia, especially the foreign policy about the Preah Vihear dispute with Thailand.

A. General Condition of Cambodia

Cambodia (officially: Kingdom of Cambodia) is a sovereign state in Southeast Asia as part of Indochina Peninsula. It has a total area of 181,035 sq km, with 97,5% land (176,515 sq km) and only 3% of the area is water (4,520 sq km)²¹. This is because Cambodia is bordering many countries like Thailand to the northwest, Laos to the northeast, and Vietnam to the east. Cambodia has the small border to the Gulf of Thailand to the southwest. The population is dense in the south around the capital, Pnom Penh.

Total population per 2015 is about 15.1 million people²², with the majority of the population (80%) live in rural areas, suffering from poverty and illiteracy. Khmers are the main ethnic group (90%), followed by Vietnamese (5%), Chinese (1%), and other (4%). Most of the Cambodian

²¹ “Cambodia”, (CIA The World Factbook March 19, 2018)
<<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/cb.html>>
accessed March 20, 2018

²² “Country profile: Cambodia”, *World Vision Australia*, 2015 (PDF)
<<https://www.worldvision.com.au/docs/default-source/school-resources/country-profile---cambodia.pdf?sfvrsn=0>> accessed March, 13
2018

practice Buddhist and speak the Khmer language, with English and French as a small secondary language.²³

The population growth of Cambodia in 2008 is quite high, up to 3,08%. Most of the people work in agriculture and so the country has not been fully industrialized yet. The main products of Cambodian agriculture are corn, rice, cotton, soy, pepper, many kinds of roots, fruits, tobacco, and sugar. Cambodia also has a small industry based on those agricultural products and mines, namely gold, phosphate, iron ore, and coal. The country is recorded to have illegal logging activities and gem mining along the western border resulted in habitat and biodiversity loss and also especially the destruction of mangrove and illegal fishing which disturb the natural fisheries.²⁴

Cambodian landscape is dominated by a large Tonle Sap (Great Lake), the Bassac River Systems, and the Mekong River, which crosses the country from North to South. The Central Plains is surrounded by dense forest and highlands with low population, covering three-quarters of the country's area. The highlands are comprised of the Elephant Mountains and Cardamom Mountain of the southwest and western regions; the Dangrek Mountains of the North adjoining of the Korat Plateau of Thailand; and Rattanakiri Plateau and Chhlong highlands on the east merging with the Central Highlands of Viet Nam.²⁵

The Mekong River is the most important river in Cambodia. Being the largest river, it dominates the hydrology of the country. The river originates in mainland China, flows

²³ “Country Case Study: Cambodia Support to media where media freedoms and rights are constrained”, *BBC Media Action*, 2012 (PDF) <<http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/mediaaction/pdf/cambodia.pdf>> accessed March, 14 2018

²⁴ “Cambodia”, (CIA The World Factbook March 19, 2018) accessed March 20, 2018

²⁵ “CAMBODIA GEOGRAPHY”, (Cambodia Tourism Site) <<http://www.tourismcambodia.com/about-cambodia/geography.htm>> accessed March 17, 2018.

through Myanmar, Laos, Thailand before entering Cambodia. It continues further southeastward to its lower delta in Viet Nam and to the South China Sea. The Mekong River is so great that for decades the country was split by the river and the only way to reach the other side of the Mekong is by boat or airplane, before the first bridge crossing the Mekong River was built in 2001.

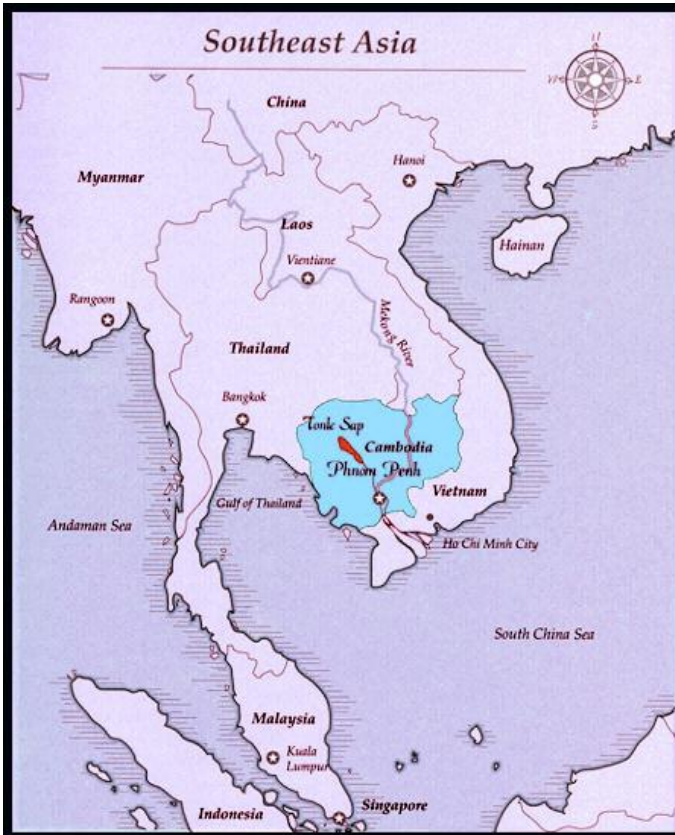


Figure 2.1 Cambodia location in Southeast Asia

Source: "CAMBODIA GEOGRAPHY",
<http://www.tourismcambodia.com/about-cambodia/geography.htm> (retrieved March 17, 2018)



Figure 2.2 The map of modern Cambodia

Source: “Cambodia”, United Nations,

<http://www.un.org/Depts/Cartographic/map/profile/cambodia.pdf> (retrieved March 11, 2018).

B. History of Cambodia

Cambodia has a long story before it becomes a country like nowadays. But regarding the topic of this undergraduate thesis, the history will be explained in three periods which are related to the case, the history during the Khmer Empire, French colonial period, and modern Cambodia.

1. Khmer Empire

Before becoming an empire, Khmer was a subject people of Chenla. Chenla itself was then absorbed by the Shailendra Empire from Java and Sumatra (Srivijaya). Although some scholars did not mention the

influence of Shailendra to be as far as Cambodia²⁶, some did state that the influence is strong enough not only in social and architecture but also in politics.²⁷ Only after Jayavarnaman II declared himself as the “god-king” (*devaraja*) in 802 and declared that Cambodia is free from Shailendra, Cambodia began to rule as an independent entity. The territory and culture of this Khmer Empire is the foundation of modern Cambodia.²⁸

Cambodia was in the form of the Khmer Empire and it lasted from 802 until 1431 according to the history. The main religion is Hinduism, and Indian culture is also strongly influencing the Empire. During this time, to reflect the Indian influence, they also start to call themselves Kampuchea or Kambuja, a name of the tribe in Northern India. This name will eventually become the name of the modern country: Cambodia. The kingdom led by several kings, but the infamous king of all is King of Jayavarman VII who ruled the kingdom from 1181 until 1219. The main religion of Hinduism is reflected by several temples which were built as the dedication to the Hindu god, including the Preah Vihear temple that began to build in

²⁶ Miriam T. Stark, “Pre-Angkorian and Angkorian Cambodia”, in *Southeast Asia: from Prehistory to History*, ed. Ian Glover and Peter Bellwood, London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004.

²⁷ Helmut Loofs-Wissowa, “The True and the Corbel Arch in Mainland Southeast Asian Monumental Architecture”, in *Southeast Asia in the 9th to 14th Centuries*, ed. David G. Marr and Anthony Crothers Milner, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1986, p. 244

²⁸ “Angkor - 802-1431” (GlobalSecurity.org)
<<https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/cambodia/history-angkor.htm>> accessed March 20, 2018.

the late 8th century during the reign of King of Jayavarman I.²⁹

In 1351, Thai Ayutthaya attacked Khmer and reach the capital Angkor. For years the attack continued, and finally in 1431 Angkor was captured by the Thai kingdom. This led to the end of Khmer Empire and the beginning of Dark Age in Cambodia. However, some historians also believe that the decline of the Khmer Empire is not caused only by the Thai invasion but also by the internal struggle. Previously, in 1259, King Indravarman III has changed the official state religion from Shaivism Hinduism into Mahayana Buddhism, changing the function of previous Hindu temples and created some instability in the kingdom. Khmer Empire also suffered from climate change, which disrupts the food production and spread disease, weakening the kingdom and make it vulnerable to foreign invasion from Thai.³⁰

Khmer Empire left no written records, therefore the historical events are known from: (1) archaeological excavation, reconstruction and investigation; (2) inscriptions on stele and on stones in the temples, which report on the political and religious deeds of the kings; (3) reliefs in a series of temple walls with depictions of military marches, life in the palace, market scenes and also the everyday lives of the population; and (4) reports and chronicles of Chinese diplomats, traders and travelers.³¹

²⁹ Mitch Hendrickson, *Historie routes to Angkor: development of the Khmer road system (ninth to thirteenth centuries AD) in mainland Southeast Asia* (PDF). The University of Sydney. Retrieved 7 August 2017.

³⁰ Lawrence G. Gundersen, "A Reassessment of the Decline of the Khmer Empire", *International Journal of Culture and History*, Vol. 1 No. 1, September 2015.

³¹ "Angkor - 802-1431" (GlobalSecurity.org) accessed March 20, 2018.

2. French Indochina

After centuries of Dark Age and under the control of foreign powers like Vietnam and Thailand, in 1863, the Kingdom of Cambodia officially became French colony after the King Norodom of Cambodia signing the agreement that would allow French to make the kingdom as a French protectorate named The French Protectorate of Cambodia as part of French Indochina Union. The decision was taken by King Norodom because at that time the kingdom of Cambodia was facing the threats from the kingdom of Siamese (today is known as modern Thailand), so the king requested a protectorate from French over the kingdom. The agreement was later signed in August 1863 which still allowed the monarchy to remain, but as per the agreement the French would hold the foreign and trade relation and chosen Phnom Penh as the powerhouse.³²

During this time of French colonialization that the time of border dispute started. In 1904, French and Siam (Thailand) made a joint commission to decide the border between two states. It was the time that France made a map about the ownership of Preah Vihear temple called Annex map I in 1907 that was drawn and stated that the temple is in the territory of Cambodia instead of Siamese Kingdom. The silence from Thailand government for years made it seemed like both Thailand and France (and later Cambodia) agreed on the map. Apparently, the dispute will arise in 1962, which will be explained more in Chapter III.

In 1941, the Axis-occupied France and France lose its formal position in its colony. The occupation will last until the end of World War II in 1945 when the Axis returned to Cambodia and France reimposed the protectorate system. However, in this new administration after the world war, France was already

³² Philippe Franchini, *Les Guerres d'Indochine*, tome 1, Pygmalion-Gérard Watelet, 1988, p. 92.

willing to give the countries in Indochina Union some form of self-government. In 1946, France allowed Cambodia to form a political party and assembly. In the 1950s, King Sihanouk began traveling to France to request France to give full independence to Cambodia because of the disputing parties and faction to gain power. He also traveled to the United States, Canada, and Japan to gain support for Cambodian independence. This travel is famously called the “royal crusade for independence”.³³ Finally, due to military deterioration of France after the world war, on July 3, 1953, France officially granted independence to three countries of Indochina Union, Cambodia, Vietnam, and Laos. Cambodia declared full independence from France on November 9, 1953.

3. Modern Cambodia

After independence, most of the history of Cambodia is filled with proxy war spilled from Vietnam.³⁴ Northern Cambodia was used by the North Vietnamese Army to attack South Vietnam. The US asked King Sihanouk to allow US campaign to defeat the North Vietnamese Army in northern Cambodia, but afraid that the war will affect Cambodia more dangerously, Sihanouk denied US request for a campaign. The turmoil within the country due to growing struggle between left wing and right wing resulted in The March 1970 Coup d'Etat by right-wing General Lon Nol. Sihanouk accused US and CIA in helping Lon Nol to overthrow him, but there was no legit evidence.³⁵

³³ “Cambodia - The Struggle for Independence” (GlobalSecurity.org) <<https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/cambodia/history-france-2.htm>> accessed March 19, 2018.

³⁴ Abdul Zahoor Khan, “The Cold War In Southeast Asia: Vietnam Conflict”, *International Journal of Business and Social Science*, Vol. 2 No. 12, July 2011, p. 166.

³⁵ Philip Short, *Pol Pot: Anatomy of a Nightmare*, New York: Henry Holt & Co., 2004, p. 196.

In 1975, Sihanouk and the left wing group called Khmer Rouge invaded Pnom Penh and established the new regime. Apparently, due to the difference in agenda and interest, Khmer Rouge then exiled Sihanouk in 1976 and established a communist country of Democratic Kampuchea. It was the time when the Cambodian Genocide by Khmer Rouge (1975-1979) happened.³⁶ Khmer Rouge regime also drew inspiration closely from the Maoist system in China, driving population out of cities and move them to rural areas to work on agriculture. Temples, libraries, and any western associations were destroyed.

In 1979, fearing that the communist in Vietnam will outgrow and occupy the communist in Cambodia (Khmer Rouge), the Cambodia-Vietnam War erupted. The war resulted and lasted until 1989 and in 1992 United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) arrived to monitor and maintain the stability in the region. The new constitution was drafted in May 1993 and reinstalled King Sihanouk and the new Kingdom of Cambodia. The new constitution was reluctantly signed by the king because it gave the king a new limited power in politics and in return gave more executive power to the prime minister. Nevertheless, the new constitution marks the era of contemporary modern Cambodia.

C. Government System and the Domestic Politics of Cambodia

Cambodia is a country which in the frame of monarchy constitutional that follow the liberal democratic system, market economy, and so pluralism, and the politics run in form of parliamentary representative democratic based on the nation's constitution in 1993. The head of the state of

³⁶ Ben Kiernan, "The Cambodian Genocide – 1975–1979", *Century of Genocide: Critical Essays and Eyewitness Accounts*, Samuel Totten et al. (ed.), New York, Routledge, 2004.

Cambodia is the king and the head of the government is the Prime minister which is pointed personally by the king and with the approval of the National Assembly. In running the government of Cambodia, the Prime minister is helped by all the ministers which are in the form of the Council of Minister. The executive power is officially done by the government, while the legislative power is done by the National Assembly and the Senate.

Unlike other monarchies, Cambodia's monarchy is not hereditary and the King is not allowed to appoint his own heir. Instead, a Royal Council of the Throne chooses the new King. The council consists of the president of the National Assembly, the Prime Minister, the President of the Senate, the First and Second Vice Presidents of the Senate, the Chiefs of the orders of Mohanikay and Thammayut, and the First and Second Vice-President of the Assembly. This council will have a meeting a week after the King's death or abdication and select the new king from the royal family who fits the criteria. This system shows that—since the 1970s—Cambodia has had a stable political system, especially in appointing the monarch.

Cambodia is a multiparty democracy, but in fact, the government is dominated by one single party which is the Cambodian People's Party (CCP). Prime Minister Hun Sen become the head of the state of Cambodia since he became the prime minister of Cambodia since 1985, appointed by the king of Cambodia himself.³⁷ He is a former member of Khmer Rouge. The Cambodian People's Party (CPP) dominated the parliament, both the upper chamber and also the lower chambers. The other party, name Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP) becomes the second biggest party after the CPP, and come after CNRP, the Sam Rainsy Party (SRP) is the third biggest party in the political arena of Cambodia. The

³⁷ David W. Roberts, *Political Transition in Cambodia 1991–1999*, 2001, Curzon Publishers.

Economist Intelligence Unit rated Cambodia as "authoritarian" in 2017.³⁸

The legislative branch of the Cambodian government is made up of a bicameral parliament. The lower house is the National Assembly (Radhsaphea). It has 123 members, elected for a five-year term by proportional representation. Meanwhile, The Senate (Protsaphea) is the upper house and has 61 members to serve for a six-year term. Two of the members are appointed by the King, two others are elected by the lower house (the National Assembly), and the other 57 are elected by "functional constituencies."

The role of the Parliament is to legislate and make laws. Bills are passed by the Parliament to be given to the King who gives the royal assent. However, The King does not have veto power so therefore all bills will get royal assent. The National Assembly also has the power to dismiss the Prime Minister and the Council of Ministers by a two-thirds vote of no confidence.

In late 2017, some speculated that Cambodia is facing a regime change to become more dictator. This is due to the action of the Prime Minister Hun Sen, announcing that he would rule at least 10 more years after serving 32 years as a PM. He also militarily threatened opposition parties, threatened a civil war if he received major rejections and limited press freedom.³⁹ Many of the members of the parliament from opposition parties were stripped of power and criminalized, some of them fled to seek help from governments in other Southeast Asian countries.⁴⁰

³⁸ EIU digital. "Democracy Index 2017 - The Economist Intelligence Unit" (PDF). <www.eiu.com> accessed March 17, 2018.

³⁹ Emma Richards, "5 signs of Cambodia's 'descent into outright dictatorship'" (Asian Correspondent, September 11, 2017) <<https://asiancorrespondent.com/2017/09/cambodia-dictatorship/#wZuUae3fhqPyle0Y.99>> accessed March 26, 2018.

⁴⁰ Gibran Maulana Ibrahim, "Krisis Politik, Anggota Parlemen Kamboja Ini Mengadu ke Fadli Zon", (DetikNews, December 7, 2017) <<https://news.detik.com/berita/d-3760106/krisis-politik-anggota-parlemen-kamboja-ini-mengadu-ke-fadli-zon>> accessed March 26, 2018.

Cambodia is divided into 24 provinces and 1 special provincial-level administrative unit of Phnom Penh. Each province is divided into districts, then into communes, and villages. The issue of this dispute, Preah Vihear temple, is located in the Choam Ksant District of Preah Vihear Province. This province is big, being the 3rd biggest province in Cambodia.

During the conflict, local people were having a good relationship with the military, therefore the clashes of Preah Vihear and the presence of military were highly supported by the local people as the way of the government to protect their common national assets. Meanwhile, in Thailand's side of Kantharalak District of Sisaket Province, the people-military relation was absent and people did not know what was going on, creating less support and trust from people to government.⁴¹

In terms of military, Cambodia is quite low, placed in 89th rank while the surrounding countries are higher (Thailand is 20th and Vietnam is 16th)⁴², with only 195,000 active personnel from its 15 million population. The Royal Cambodian Armed Forces consist of Royal Cambodian Army, Royal Cambodian Navy, Royal Cambodian Air Force, and Royal Gendarmerie of Cambodia (paramilitary domestic police). The military budget is spent from 2% of GDP (about US \$383 million). Since 1999, Cambodia has been demobilizing the army to lower the number of personnel as the sign of peace and stable condition of the country.

History recorder that Cambodia has received various military aid even before independence. Among those countries which give aid are France, the US, China, and the Soviet Union. Those countries gave the aid in a different period and for the different purpose. Basically, US dan France gave

⁴¹ Aniek Oudshoorn, "The Thai-Cambodian Border Dispute: The Overlapping Area", *Master Thesis, Radboud University*, 2015, p. 50.

⁴² "2017 Military Strength Ranking" (Global Fire Power, 2018)
<<https://www.globalfirepower.com/countries-listing.asp>> accessed March 22, 2018.

support to the non-communist regime, while China dan Soviet was the opposite. However, due to a huge amount of French influence in Cambodian politics and military, it transforms the Cambodia military corps into more French-like.⁴³ Besides France, the US was also known to give great military modernization into Cambodia organized as *Forces Armées Royales Khmères* (FARK).⁴⁴ But, due to technical problems and different interest during the Vietnam war, in 1963 the aid was stopped.

⁴³ “Defending the Kingdom of Cambodia”, 2000, *report of the government of Cambodia*, p. 7.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p. 7-9