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CLINTON'S FAILURE IN CAMBODIA

INTRODUCTION

Following elections sponsored by the United Nations in 1993 in Cambodia, the Clinton Administration hailed that country as a democratic success story and a model for multilateral foreign policy. Following this past weekend's military coup by Second Prime Minister Hun Sen, Cambodia now can be called a colossal failure of U.N.-led multilateralism. The 1993 elections were the result of a nearly \$3 billion U.N. peacekeeping exercise. The winner of the elections, First Prime Minister Norodom Ranariddh, is now in exile. Hun Sen, the former communist ruler of Cambodia and loser of the 1993 election, is calling for Ranariddh's arrest and is suppressing his remaining supporters. Hun Sen's coup is likely to push Cambodia toward becoming another Burma: a dictatorship that crushes dissent, is increasingly beholden to drug traffickers, and is ripe for increasing Chinese influence. The coup also could empower the Khmer Rouge, by default the most powerful opponents to Hun Sen in Cambodia. Democratic Cambodians increasingly may be attracted to the Khmer Rouge, which can be expected to renew its war against the regime of Hun Sen's Cambodian People's Party (CPP).

Failure for Clinton

Cambodia also represents a failure of Clinton Administration's leadership in Asia. Since the early 1950s, the United States has spent over \$3 billion and over 500 American lives trying to help Cambodia on the path toward democracy. The Reagan and Bush Administrations worked diligently to isolate the Khmer Rouge and the CPP government installed by Vietnam in 1979, and to bring about the U.N.-led transition culminating in the 1993 elections. Bill Clinton failed to build on those gains by allowing Hun Sen to bully Prince Ranariddh into a coalition government. Hun Sen used his control over the army and key government ministries to consolidate his power, profit from an increasing trade in drugs, and harass Cambodia's democratic forces.

Paradoxically, the U.S. Department of State tried to build better relations with Hun Sen instead of using its leverage over U.S. and international aid to curb his abuses and strengthen democratic leaders. A Hun Sen-led coup became increasingly likely in mid-1997 as relations deteriorated between Ranariddh and Hun Sen. The miscalculation in

U.S. policy contributed to Hun Sen's strength and very likely emboldened him to challenge the result of the 1993 elections. In the end, one of the key architects of Clinton Administration policy, Ambassador Kenneth Quinn, only could plead with Hun Sen's generals on the eve of the coup, telling them, "It would not be understood in my country if in fact we had a civil war in Phnom Penh."¹

The Clinton Administration and the State Department should shed their blinders about Hun Sen and prepare to apply pressure to prevent further violence. Hun Sen can be expected to crack down further on Cambodia's remaining democrats. According to press reports, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) has linked Hun Sen's troops to a March 30 assassination attempt against Sam Rainsy, Cambodia's most prominent democratic leader.² Members of Rainsy's Khmer Nation Party and many other Cambodians in pro-democratic nongovernmental organizations are in danger. The Khmer Rouge may gather more supporters, as democratic Cambodians turn to them as the only organized resistance to Hun Sen. Such conflict could invite increasing involvement by Vietnam and China—with the latter likely to prevail due to its much greater resources. It was this instability that the United States and many other countries sought to end in 1993.

Had the Clinton Administration fought to preserve and expand upon Cambodia's democratic progress after 1993, Hun Sen's coup of last weekend could have been prevented. Now the Administration must devise a strategy to use what international influence remains over Hun Sen to prevent further violence and reorient Cambodia toward a democratic path.

To recover from its failed policy in Cambodia, the Administration should:

- **Admit the failure to protect the long-term U.S. investment in Cambodia.** Despite a U.S. investment of \$3.1 billion since the 1950s and the largest peace-keeping operation in U.N. history from 1990 to 1993, hope for a peaceful future for Cambodia has been dashed for the foreseeable future by a coup that could have been prevented. The Clinton Administration should acknowledge its failure to achieve peace in Cambodia as the first step in reformulating its Cambodia policy.
- **Refuse to recognize the new Hun Sen-led government in Cambodia.** Hun Sen's coup destroyed a government that resulted from free and fair elections in 1993. The United States should not confer diplomatic recognition on this government.
- **Press U.S. allies to deny recognition to the Hun Sen regime.** Washington should press its allies not to recognize this government. In particular, the United States should press the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) not to allow Cambodia to become a member of this prestigious organization.
- **Strongly criticize Hun Sen's violence and the growing drug trade in Cambodia.** The U.S. Department of State should stop coddling Hun Sen and fully criticize his many abuses.

1 Seth Mydans, "Fighting Erupts Between Cambodia's Two Rival Leaders," *The New York Times*, July 6, 1997, p. A4.

2 R. Jeffrey Smith, "FBI Point Finger In Cambodian Attack," *The Washington Post*, June 29, 1997, p. A20.

- **Call for a suspension of international assistance to Cambodia pending a resumption of the Paris Peace Conference.** Hun Sen's government relies on foreign aid for 40 percent to 50 percent of its budget. Washington should press for a suspension of all foreign aid to Cambodia pending Hun Sen's return to the peace table. U.S. aid should be linked to a resumption of democratic reforms.
- **Devise a strategy for strengthening Cambodia's true democrats.** The United States now should embrace and aid democratic Cambodian leaders like Sam Rainsy to provide Cambodians with an alternative to the Khmer Rouge.

WHY CAMBODIA IS IMPORTANT TO THE UNITED STATES

Throughout the Cold War period, the U.S. interest in Cambodia was defined largely by the U.S. conflicts with Vietnam and the Soviet Union. Despite the decline of the Soviet threat in Asia, the 1995 normalization of relations with Vietnam, and the most recent coup, however, the reasons for continuing to help Cambodian democracy succeed remain as strong as ever.

Reason #1: The United States already has invested substantial resources in trying to help Cambodia. Cambodia's political and economic development is important to the United States partly because of the enormous political and economic investment the United States has made in that country: U.S. taxpayers have contributed over \$3.1 billion in economic and military assistance since 1953, and over 500 Americans died in Cambodia during the Vietnam War. The United States worked diplomatically to isolate both the genocidal Khmer Rouge regime and its successor, the CPP, a government installed by the invading Vietnamese troops in 1978. By the mid-1980s, the Reagan Administration—working with Thailand and Singapore—supported non-communist resistance groups opposing the CPP. The end of Soviet aid to Vietnam in the late 1980s led to the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Cambodia in 1988. This provided an opportunity for the Bush Administration to work with Cambodia's neighbors to help the various factions in Cambodia (the CPP, the non-communist groups, and the Khmer Rouge) arrive at the 1991 Paris Peace Agreement. The Paris accords established the U.N. Transitional Authority for Cambodia (UNTAC), which was supposed to administer the country until a new government could emerge from the national elections in May 1993. The United States paid for 25 percent of this nearly \$3 billion peacekeeping operation, the largest ever undertaken by the U.N.

Reason #2: The United States can more effectively quell the growth of an emerging narco-state by promoting a democratic Cambodia. The Cambodian government is repaying U.S. generosity by allowing its drug trade to escalate. In 1995, a Cambodian policeman told the United States that close to 1,300 pounds of heroin transits from Cambodia to Europe or the United States each week.³ That same year, a U.S. official told the *Far Eastern Economic Review* that criminal syndicates in Cambodia "are using government planes, helicopters, military trucks, navy boats and soldiers to transport heroin."⁴

3 This estimate was contained in President Bill Clinton's February 23, 1996, letter to the U.S. Congress listing Cambodia as a country involved in the drug trade. The letter also admitted there was little evidence to confirm this estimate. If true, 1,300 pounds of heroin would have a street value of about \$97 million.

4 Nate Thayer, "Medellin on the Mekong," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, November 23, 1995, p. 24. After writing this article, Thayer—perhaps the most respected foreign journalist in Cambodia at that time—had to leave the country for his own safety.

From 1995 to 1996, Cambodian and Interpol records indicated a 1,000 percent increase in seized drugs originating from Cambodia. About 59 tons of Cambodian marijuana was seized in 1996.⁵

Suspected drug lords are key supporters of Hun Sen and, in turn, are protected by him. One suspected drug trafficker, Cambodian Chamber of Commerce President Theng Bunma, has given Hun Sen new large Russian helicopters, pays an estimated \$2 million a month in taxes, and has extended multimillion-dollar loans to the government.⁶ In January 1996, Hun Sen declared he would “never abandon” Theng Bunma. In January 1997, however, the U.S. Department of State quietly banned Bunma from entering the United States, partly because of his drug connections.⁷ Like Burma, Cambodia could evolve into a true narco-state. As such, it might well be shunned by much of the world and become vulnerable to greater Chinese influence.

Reason #3: Cambodia’s democratic transition remains important to U.S. interests. A democratic Cambodia is more likely to adopt economic and political reforms that reduce its need for foreign aid and serve as an example to non-democratic neighbors like Vietnam. In 1993, Cambodia’s National Assembly passed a new constitution and liberal investment laws, and created an environment that allowed the press to flourish. For U.S. goals in Southeast Asia, it is important that Vietnam also institute greater economic and political freedoms. A more economically and politically liberal Vietnam is more likely to become a valuable future U.S. partner in that region. A successful democratic transition in formerly communist Cambodia could help the prospects for reform in Vietnam.

Even after Hun Sen’s coup it is likely that a democratic spirit remains strong among Cambodians. In 1993, an overwhelming 90 percent of registered voters voted in the U.N.-run elections—the first free elections in that country’s history. Amid rising tension this month both Ranariddh and Hun Sen committed themselves to new elections scheduled for next May. Now that he has total power, Hun Sen is likely to postpone these elections indefinitely. Should international pressure force new elections, there are Cambodian leaders who form a democratic alternative to Hun Sen. These include Khmer Nation Party leader Sam Rainsy and former Foreign Minister Prince Norodom Sirivudh, who have survived Hun Sen’s efforts to suppress Cambodian democrats. Before Ranariddh left Cambodia, he was moving toward a coalition with Rainsy and Sirivudh to contest the 1998 elections.

Hun Sen’s Power Grab. Although Prince Ranariddh has contributed to the reversal of Cambodia’s early democratic development, Hun Sen deserves most of the blame. After losing the 1993 election, Hun Sen forced Ranariddh into a coalition government that Ranariddh could not control. Ranariddh at first protested the coalition, but then agreed to it under pressure from his father, King Sihanouk. Hun Sen proceeded with a strategy that divided democratic opponents and suppressed vocal journalists.

Hun Sen pushed Ranariddh to remove government corruption critic Sam Rainsy from the position of finance minister in late 1994 and to expel him from the National

5 Nate Thayer, “Narco Nexus,” *Far Eastern Economic Review*, April 24, 1997, p. 21.

6 *Ibid.*; Elisabeth Pisani, “Cambodia: Activities of Alleged Drug Lord Noted,” *Asia Times* (Bangkok), March 12, 1996, p. 4, in *FBIS-EAS-96-049*, March 12, 1996, p. 71.

7 Thayer, “Narco Nexus.” Burma has denied allegations of drug trafficking, and sued both Thayer and the *Review* after the 1995 article.

Assembly and Ranariddh's FUNCINPEC⁸ Party in 1995. Rainsy's expulsion marked the end of useful debate in the National Assembly. Although continually harassed and threatened, Rainsy formed the Khmer Nation Party in 1996. During a peaceful, government-approved rally on March 30, three grenades apparently aimed at Rainsy killed 19 demonstrators and wounded over 100, including Ron Abney of the U.S. National Republican Institute. Rainsy accused Hun Sen of authorizing the attack. Reports note that Cambodian Army troops protected the grenade throwers, who then ran toward a compound controlled by the CPP.⁹

Hun Sen also has worked to reduce the influence of Cambodia's royal family. In late 1996, Hun Sen accused Prince Norodom Sirivudh, then an emerging government critic, of conspiring to assassinate him. Despite the scant evidence of such a conspiracy, Sirivudh was arrested and forced to choose exile over imprisonment. A government-controlled court then tried him in absentia and sentenced him to 10 years in prison to prevent his return. In late April 1997, Sirivudh tried to return to Phnom Penh but was prevented from doing so.

Although he eventually warmed to his 1993 forced alliance with Hun Sen and participated in the ouster of Rainsy, Ranariddh became Hun Sen's next target. In early May 1997, in an unsuccessful bid to gain a ruling majority in the National Assembly, Hun Sen tried to force a split in Ranariddh's FUNCINPEC Party; but of the 12 FUNCINPEC members Hun Sen tried to bully or bribe, only two defected. The 74-year-old King Sihanouk, whose relations with Ranariddh have been difficult, was unable to protect Sirivudh and intervenes less in Cambodian politics as his health declines.¹⁰

Tensions that led to the coup mounted through May and June as troops loyal to Ranariddh and Hun Sen clashed more frequently.¹¹ On May 29, Hun Sen's motorcade was shot at in what his aides claimed was an assassination attempt.¹² In June, Hun Sen decided to use his troops to warn Ranariddh away from an alliance with defecting Khmer Rouge guerrillas led by Ieng Sary. Troops loyal to Hun Sen attacked Ranariddh's in a two-hour gun and rocket battle on June 17. Two of Ranariddh's soldiers were killed and a rocket hit the compound of U.S. Ambassador Kenneth Quinn.¹³ Having exposed the weakness of Ranariddh's troops, Hun Sen may have opted to take full power starting on July 3. The next day Ranariddh left Cambodia for France on the advice of his generals. Fighting intensified, and by July 6 Hun Sen declared he was in total control.¹⁴

It is likely that threats to remaining democrats will increase. While Rainsy, Sirivudh, and Ranariddh are all out of Cambodia, their supporters inside the country are vulnerable to arrest or worse harassment. Particularly vulnerable are nongovernmental organizations that promote democracy and journalists who have criticized the government.

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- 8 FUNCINPEC is the French acronym for United National Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful and Cooperative Cambodia.
- 9 Joshua Phillips and Jason Barbers, "Killers on Foot and Moto," *Phnom Penh Post*, April 4-17, 1997, p. 5.
- 10 The decline of the King's influence and the rise of Hun Sen are described in William Shawcross, "The Corruption of Cambodia," *The New York Review of Books*, November 14, 1996, pp. 41-46.
- 11 Rodney Tasker, "Fighting Words," *The Far Eastern Economic Review*, May 15, 1997, p. 21; R. Jeffrey Smith, "\$3 Billion Effort Fails to Pacify Cambodia," *The Washington Post*, June 14, 1997, pp. A1, A15.
- 12 "Paralyzed," *The Economist*, May 31, 1997, p. 40.
- 13 John D. Cramer, "Opposing Factions Battle In Cambodian Capital," *The Washington Post*, June 18, 1997, p. A22; Som Sattana, "Cambodian Factions Erupt In Gunfight," *The Washington Times*, June 18, 1997, p. A13.
- 14 Keith B. Richburg, "Chaos Mounts in Cambodia," *The Washington Post*, July 7, 1997, p. A1.

Reason #4: Cambodia again could become a fulcrum of conflict in Southeast Asia.

Hun Sen's coup increases the chances that Khmer Rouge could regain strength, raising the prospect of renewed Chinese–Vietnamese competition in Cambodia. Despite fielding only some 2,000 to 3,000 guerrilla fighters today, the Khmer Rouge is the most effective organized opposition to Hun Sen in Cambodia. Since the 1978 Vietnamese invasion, the Khmer Rouge has fought the CPP-led governments and continued attacks against the coalition government. Khmer Rouge unity was shattered last summer by the defection to the government of Ieng Sary, the second in command after Pol Pot and a potential foe of Hun Sen. Sary's defection may have been part of a strategic decision to seek power by peaceful united front tactics. Both Ranariddh and Hun Sen had been vying for Sary's support before the coup. But the coup may prompt Khmer Rouge hardliners to seek a renewed guerrilla war against Hun Sen. Absent a U.S.-led effort to build a democratic alternative, democratic Cambodians may increasingly support the Khmer Rouge as the only viable opposition.

China and Vietnam could become embroiled in Cambodia again by a renewed guerrilla war or by a simple contest for influence. China, the principal backer of the Khmer Rouge throughout the 1980s, may be tempted to threaten a resumption of aid to gain leverage over Hun Sen. In response, Hun Sen could request greater assistance from his Vietnamese allies, which could take the form of increased military aid. Reports that Hun Sen visited Vietnam prior to his coup raise the possibility Hanoi gave its consent. But in a contest between the two, China has the advantage of greater resources with which to gain greater influence over the long run. Last year, China initiated a small assistance program for Cambodia's military. U.S. government sources have told analysts at The Heritage Foundation that this Chinese assistance is designed to help Hun Sen's faction. For Washington, both possibilities present dangers. Renewed warfare in Cambodia could threaten stability in Southeast Asia. And increased Chinese influence in Cambodia could further retard the potential for democratic development there and reduce U.S. influence in Southeast Asia.

FIVE ADMINISTRATION MISTAKES IN CAMBODIA POLICY

Instead of building on the costly gains made thus far by the Cambodians and the international community, the Clinton Administration has undermined the long-term commitment of the United States to Cambodia through a series of mistakes.

Mistake #1: The Clinton Administration was slow to criticize election violence in

1993. Through 1992, the Bush Administration had tried, but failed, to push UNTAC to take full control of Cambodia's administration. This failure allowed the CPP to retain control of Cambodia's army and police, which it used to terrorize non-communist candidates and to bribe Cambodians. By the time President Clinton took office in 1993, the UNTAC operation was threatened by pre-election violence. The new Clinton Administration, beset with other pressing concerns, was slow to criticize this violence and even slower to criticize the CPP.¹⁵ By successfully terrorizing the elections, the CPP had learned that it could challenge Washington and the U.N.

15 Richard D. Fisher, "Saving Democracy in Cambodia," Heritage Foundation *Asian Studies Center Backgrounder* No. 135, March 23, 1995, p. 9.

Mistake #2: The Administration's failure to oppose the coalition government after the elections effectively betrayed the non-communist victors. By not opposing Hun Sen's forced entry into a coalition government in 1993, the Clinton Administration shares some blame for the subsequent marginalization of Cambodia's democrats. After the 1993 elections, Hun Sen threatened a coup against the new government led by Ranariddh, the victor. It should have been clear to officials at the U.S. Department of State that Hun Sen's flouting of UNTAC authority and his terrorism during the election campaign made him unfit to help usher in a period of democratic transformation in Cambodia. Instead of insisting that the victors assume the power that rightfully was theirs, the Department of State failed to object when King Sihanouk pushed Ranariddh to accept the coalition with the CPP.

The expedience Ranariddh and other Cambodian democrats demonstrated in accepting this deal does not excuse the Clinton Administration's lapse of principle. By forcing his way into a coalition with Ranariddh, Hun Sen gained legitimate powers that he has used to undermine the election's winners.

Mistake #3: The Clinton Administration generally has catered to Hun Sen instead of criticizing his abuses and threats. In early December 1995, Hun Sen publicly threatened to hold demonstrations against the U.S. Embassy in Phnom Penh and demanded \$20 billion in compensation for U.S. wartime damage.¹⁶ The U.S. response was anything but stern: Barely a week later, then Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Kent Wiedemann stated that he was "happy to report" that human rights was a concept that "suffused the Cambodian government."¹⁷ To make matters worse, former Assistant Secretary of State Winston Lord continued to voice this ambivalent message to Hun Sen in January 1996 before a visit to Phnom Penh: "I will convey our concern about...intimidation of journalists [and] opposition politicians" but "don't think we can be overly demanding of a country that has so much to overcome."¹⁸

Conflicting statements from U.S. officials in the face of abuses and ridicule by Hun Sen cannot help but cause him to believe that the Clinton Administration presents no serious challenge to his actions. Hun Sen has responded with contempt for such weakness. Approximately one month after Lord's departure, Hun Sen gave a speech in which he contrasted U.S. bombing of Cambodia with U.S. support for human rights: "The United States dropped bombs indiscriminantly.... I do not want to recall past history, but now that the United States comes to try to do something good I need to retort.... Why do they champion human rights here?"¹⁹

This year, the U.S. Department of State has added two more demonstrations of weakness in the face of Hun Sen's bullying. The first involves the investigation by the FBI of the March 30 attack at Rainsy's rally in which one American was injured. When the FBI investigators received death threats, Ambassador Quinn reportedly sent them home.²⁰ Hun Sen, already suspected of involvement in the attack, stood to gain the most by

16 Phnom Penh National Radio of Cambodia Network, December 4, 1995, in *FBIS-EAS-95-223*, December 5, 1995, p. 60.

17 In reporting this comment, *The Economist* quoted a Western official who quipped that Wiedemann "must have come from another planet." See "Cambodia on the Slide," *The Economist*, December 16, 1995, p. 32.

18 Remarks of Assistant Secretary of State Winston Lord in Bangkok, Thailand, January 15, 1996.

19 Phnom Penh National Radio of Cambodia, February 26, 1996, in *FBIS-EAS-96-039*, February 27, 1996, p. 57.

20 Smith, "FBI Points Finger in Cambodian Attack."

scaring away the FBI investigators; by failing to protect them until their mission was complete, Quinn lost an opportunity to demonstrate U.S. resolve. The second incident—Secretary of State Madeleine Albright’s failure to visit Phnom Penh in late June—also may well have given comfort to Hun Sen: It was the June 16 attack by his troops on those of Ranariddh that led to Albright’s decision to downgrade her visit, and ultimately gave Ranariddh and Hun Sen an excuse to refuse her.²¹

Mistake #4: The Administration supports aiding Cambodia while letting reforms

slide. Although the United States and the international community have been very generous to Cambodia, the Clinton Administration has been reluctant to link U.S. aid to real progress in achieving political reform. It also has been reluctant to press international donors to demand reform in Cambodia. A rare example of Administration criticism of the Cambodian government occurred at an April 1996 forum in Washington, D.C., during which Wiedemann revealed that he gave Hun Sen a “civics lesson” in a December 1995 meeting by linking the regime’s performance to future U.S. aid.²² Two weeks later, however, Ambassador Quinn contradicted Wiedemann, telling the *Phnom Penh Post* that U.S. aid was not linked to reforms. Quinn welcomed “continued progress...towards protection of human rights, democracy, and free market economy and tolerance of opposition views” but then added, “These are not conditions of aid but goals of U.S. policy.”²³

The United States has provided \$145.5 million in economic aid to Cambodia since 1993, and the Administration is seeking \$35 million more for FY 1998. All told, from 1992 to 1996, Cambodia has received about \$2 billion in aid from other countries and from multilateral institutions supported by the United States. Foreign assistance typically has comprised about 40 percent to 50 percent of the Cambodian government’s annual budget. Cambodia’s economic successes include passage of a liberal investment law, the controlling of inflation, and annual economic growth rates in the 6 percent to 7 percent range; but there are problems as well, including widespread corruption and difficulty in securing approval even for minor investments. Foreign investors willing to accept risk have invested in the tourism, textile, and energy sectors.²⁴

What threatens Cambodia’s economic development most, however, is its decaying political stability. The Clinton Administration’s refusal to link U.S. and international aid to a schedule of political reforms constitutes a failure to use its leverage in Cambodia.

Mistake #5: The Administration’s policy is coddling Cambodia’s drug lords. By not cracking down on known Cambodian drug lords, the U.S. Department of State has made a mockery of U.S. anti-drug efforts. In 1996 and 1997, Cambodia has been on the congressionally mandated list of major countries involved in the drug trade, but the Clinton Administration has certified that Cambodia is trying to stop the flow of drugs. Since 1995, the United States has given Cambodia \$535,000 to train customs agents in counter-narcotics methods.

In 1994, according to the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, the Department of State gave Cambodian Chamber of Commerce President Theng Bunma a visa to travel to the

21 William Branigin, “Cambodian Rivals Agree on Spurning of Albright,” *The Washington Post*, June 27, 1997, p. A30.

22 Kent M. Wiedemann, remarks at Heritage Foundation symposium, “Is Cambodia a Failure of Global Good Intentions?” April 17, 1996.

23 “Quinn: U.S. Policy and the Cambodia challenge,” *Phnom Penh Post*, May 3–16, 1996, p. 18.

24 Murray Hubert and Matthew Lee, “Hidden Costs,” *Far Eastern Economic Review*, July 11, 1996, p. 57.

United States as part of a Cambodian government delegation led by CPP Chairman Chea Sim, despite the fact that then-U.S. Ambassador Charles Twining knew of Bunma's drug connections.²⁵ Bunma reportedly funded the 1994 visit. In December 1996, Ambassador Quinn rode with Bunma in his new helicopter; and when the Department of State recently put Bunma on the visa blacklist, it reportedly had to override objections from Quinn's Embassy.²⁶ According to Ranariddh, Hun Sen mocks U.S. drug concerns: "Hun Sen has jokingly said, 'I got my money from drugs—Interpol come and arrest me.'"²⁷

HOW TO RECOVER FROM CLINTON'S FAILURES IN CAMBODIA

Hun Sen's coup highlights the weakness of U.N.-led multilateral foreign policy and also a failure of Clinton Administration leadership in Asia. Even successful U.N. peacekeeping operations are vulnerable to failure if the gains are not defended. This is what happened in Cambodia. Since 1993, the obligation to defend the U.N.'s gains, and U.S. interests in Cambodia's democratic success, fell to the Clinton Administration, which then failed to do its job. Administration policies that coddled Hun Sen allowed him to build his strength, which he used to take over the government by July 7. Despite continued generous U.S. economic support for Cambodia, Hun Sen repeatedly displayed disdain for the Clinton Administration. For example, Hun Sen and Ranariddh refused a June 28 visit by Secretary of State Albright.

The failure to prevent Hun Sen's coup also underscores the Clinton Administration's inability to defend U.S. interests in Asia. The U.S. interest in promoting multilateral burden-sharing solutions to threats has been set back; the lesson of Cambodia is that even the most expensive peacekeeping efforts can fail. The U.S. interest in promoting peace in Southeast Asia is now threatened by the prospect of renewed warfare between Hun Sen and the Khmer Rouge. In addition, the U.S. interest in preventing a return of the Khmer Rouge could be damaged by the group's new opportunities to build support by organizing opposition to Hun Sen's coup. This instability will give China new opportunities to extend its influence in Cambodia, which could come at the expense of the United States and its allies. Finally, a failure to consolidate Cambodian democracy will strengthen those who oppose economic and political liberalization in Vietnam. This also could be a setback for the United States, as opponents of reform in Vietnam also favor closer ties with China.

Recovering the damage to Cambodia's democratic potential now will require an effort similar to that mounted by the United States, Australia, Japan, other members of ASEAN, and other countries to bring the Cambodian factions to the Paris peace table in the late 1980s. As then, a future effort to promote democratic stability in Cambodia will require renewed U.S. leadership.

New measures are necessary to prevent Cambodia from becoming a fulcrum for conflict, as it was during the 1980s. Tough, principled policies toward Cambodia (unlike Burma, China, or Indonesia) can contribute to practical outcomes like democratic reforms. The Administration, however, must be willing to coordinate a multilateral set of political and economic sanctions.

25 Thayer, "Medellin on the Mekong."

26 Thayer, "Narco Nexus," p. 20.

27 Tasker, "Fighting Words."

Specifically, the Clinton Administration should:

- **Admit its failure to protect the long-term U.S. investment in Cambodia.** The embarrassment that Cambodia's prime ministers caused Secretary of State Albright by refusing an airport meeting, compounded by Hun Sen's coup, should prompt her to order a thorough reexamination of U.S. policy toward Cambodia. Americans can be proud of their sacrifices for the sake of peace in Cambodia, but they also deserve a frank and truthful accounting of how their \$3 billion investment in democratic reform in Cambodia has been dealt a serious setback by Hun Sen's coup.
- **Refuse to recognize the new Hun Sen-led government in Cambodia.** The United States should withhold diplomatic recognition of the Hun Sen-led government in Cambodia. His coup destroyed a government that resulted from free and fair elections in 1993. Furthermore, the Administration should recall Ambassador Quinn. To demonstrate support for democracy advocates, Washington should not recognize a government in Cambodia unless it is fairly elected. Cambodia should be told that it is in danger of losing most favored nation trade status, conferred just last year, as congressional critics seek to express disapproval.
- **Press U.S. allies to deny recognition to the Hun Sen regime.** It also is critical that the Clinton Administration move rapidly to press its allies not to recognize Hun Sen's government. In particular, the United States should press ASEAN not to allow Cambodia to become a member of this important organization. Cambodia is due to be admitted formally into ASEAN at its annual foreign ministers summit later this month. ASEAN members should be told that allowing Cambodia into its ranks will serve to sanction Hun Sen's coup and to undermine the prestige of their organization. ASEAN members also should be told that Hun Sen's coup could threaten peace in Southeast Asia by prompting a renewed guerrilla war led by the Khmer Rouge and by causing conflict that ultimately could benefit China. It also is important for the Administration to press Japan not to support the Hun Sen government. Japan had been biased toward Hun Sen before the 1993 election.²⁸ Tokyo should be told that its opposition to Hun Sen's coup will be viewed in Washington as a measure of its leadership potential in Asia.
- **Strongly criticize Hun Sen's violence and the growing drug trade in Cambodia.** Following Hun Sen's violent coup that has caused much loss of life and property in Phnom Penh, the U.S. Department of State should end its policy of coddling him and fully criticize his history of abuse. The White House and the Department of State should condemn the coup. The Department of State's Human Rights Bureau should produce a history of political violence in Cambodia since 1993 focusing on abuses by Hun Sen's CPP. The United States should warn Hun Sen that, if he continues to use violence to suppress Cambodian democrats and to attack Cambodian democratic leaders in exile, the CPP will be treated as a terrorist organization.

28 Richard D. Fisher, "Tokyo Exhibits a Risky Bias in Cambodia," *The Asian Wall Street Journal Weekly*, April 19, 1993, p. 15.

Furthermore, the U.S. Department of State should make public the findings of the FBI investigation into the March 30 assassination attempt against Sam Rainsy, which also wounded one American. Because this investigation reportedly implicates Hun Sen's troops, the release of this report offers an opportunity to criticize the history of Hun Sen's political violence. Congress should ask whether Ambassador Quinn was justified in sending FBI investigators home in the face of threats. Congress should ask whether this response showed weakness based on Hun Sen's previous threats and whether FBI investigators could have been provided with additional protection to complete their inquiry.

The Department of State should end the kid gloves treatment of Cambodian drug lords. The U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency should undertake an intelligence-gathering operation that quickly investigates any connection between Cambodian drug dealers and government officials. Then, in cooperation with Interpol, if the findings demonstrate the existence of such connections, legal charges should be prepared against Cambodian drug dealers and their government sponsors.

- **Call for a suspension of international assistance to Cambodia pending a resumption of the Paris Peace Conference.** The Administration should devise a strategy to lead Cambodia's foreign aid donors to use their financial leverage to force Hun Sen back to a path of democratic reform. Hun Sen's government relies on foreign aid for about 40 to 50 percent of its budget. The first step should be to suspend all U.S. aid to Cambodia. Washington then should encourage Japan and France to follow its example. The United States then should press for an international conference on Cambodia to include the main promoters of the 1990 Paris Peace Agreement that led to the U.N. peacekeeping mission. The Hun Sen government should be instructed that a resumption of international aid will depend on its cooperating with this body and committing to a deliberate process of democratic reform. China and Vietnam should be told that their support for this process will be measure of their support for stability in Southeast Asia.
- **Devise a strategy for strengthening Cambodia's true democrats.** The Clinton Administration should now seek to strengthen Cambodian democratic leaders to provide that country with a political alternative to Hun Sen and the Khmer Rouge. As they came under increasing pressure after 1993 from Hun Sen, Ranariddh, or both, Cambodian democrats like Sam Rainsy and Prince Sirivudh were kept at arm's length by the Department of State. The Administration should correct this mistake by offering to support and to protect these Cambodian democratic leaders. When they visit the United States, these leaders should be offered official protection services and regular meetings with top-level U.S. officials. To sustain democratic activists in Cambodia, the United States should consider programs of covert assistance for their efforts. U.S. broadcasting services like Voice of America and Radio Free Asia should step up their reporting on Cambodia to provide the Cambodian people with information on Hun Sen regime and international reaction to it.

CONCLUSION

The Clinton Administration should acknowledge its failures in Cambodia, the threats the U.S. interests in Southeast Asia that could flow from Hun Sen's coup, and formulate a new strategy to push Cambodia toward a path of democratic reform. In the wake of Hun Sen's violent coup, Cambodia's democratic prospects are bleak. The coup could lead to a resurgence of the bloody Khmer Rouge. Or such conflict could give China opportunities to expand its influence. And the growing drug trade raises the possibility that Cambodia could become another narco-state like Burma. Such prospects could negatively affect the prospects for liberal reforms in Vietnam as well.

All of these possibilities are at variance with the long-standing effort of the United States to promote a peaceful and prosperous future in Cambodia as a means of strengthening stability in Southeast Asia. That Hun Sen was allowed to build his strength since 1993 to the point that he could conduct his coup marks one of the most glaring foreign policy failures of the Clinton Administration. The United States now should devise a strategy that uses international political and financial leverage over Hun Sen to force him to commit to a process of democratic reform. In addition, the United States now should assist Cambodian democratic leaders directly to provide that country with a future political alternative to Hun Sen and the Khmer Rouge. If he does not take these steps, President Bill Clinton risks being recorded as the second president to "lose" Cambodia in just 27 years.

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