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Master's Thesis of International Studies

**Cambodia's Foreign Policy amid
U.S.-China Great Power Competition:
Local to Grand Geopolitics**

미중 전략 경쟁 속 캄보디아의 외교정책:
현지지정학에서 대지정학으로

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**Cambodia's Foreign Policy amid
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Abstract

Cambodia has had a long history of foreign influences. Even after gaining Independence from France in 1953, it was unfortunately bound by its geographical location and again fell into another trap of the ideological struggle Cold War. Although Cambodia pursued a policy of neutrality and joined Non-Alignment Movement, it was eventually dragged into Vietnam War. The spillover effect made Cambodia fall into a civil war of its own and resulted in a tragic regime of genocide that killed millions of people. Comparably, today's geopolitics of the great power competition seems to suggest the same scenario for Cambodia if it is not careful in maneuvering its course out of trouble. However, Cambodia has been put in a very delicate situation as it is not only surrounded by the U.S. and China, but it is also sandwiched in between its two neighbors, Thailand and Vietnam.

Therefore, this research seeks to understand Cambodia's foreign policy by identifying state's position and interests which govern its behaviors amid the superpowers' powerplay through dual geopolitical analysis. In other words, Cambodia's foreign policy towards the U.S. and China (grand geopolitics) is being tied to its relations with the two neighbors Thailand and Vietnam (local geopolitics). As a result, Cambodia needs to make a political calculation carefully by adopting an indirect balancing strategy against Thailand and Vietnam through extending its hand and diversifying its relations with other powers, mainly the great powers. Yet, the reciprocity and the shared strategic interests between Cambodia and the superpowers

may either buttress Cambodia's relations with them or keep Cambodia at arm's length.

Keyword: Cambodia, great powers, foreign policy, geopolitics, geography, diplomatic history

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Abbreviations

AOIP	ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CNRP	Cambodia National Rescue Party
CPP	Cambodian People's Party
DRVN	Democratic Republic of Vietnam
EBA	Everything But Arms
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zones
EU	European Union
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FTA	Free Trade Agreement
FUNCIPEC	Front Uni National pour un Cambodge Indépendant, Neutre, Pacifique et Coopératif (National United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful and Cooperative Cambodia)
GPOI	Global Peacekeeping Operations Initiative
ICJ	International Court of Justice
IR	International Relations
KUFNS	Kampuchea United Front for National Salvation
LANGO	Law on Association and Non-Governmental Organizations
LMI	Lower Mekong Initiative
MAAG	Military Assistance Advisory Group
MIA	Missing in action
MISTI	Ministry of Industry, Science, Technology and Innovation
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NAM	Non-Alignment Movement

NDI	National Democratic Institute
NEC	National Election Committee
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NTR	Normal Trade Relations
NUFK	National United Front of Kampuchea
ODA	Official Development Assistance
PACOM	United States Pacific Command
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PRK	People's Republic of Kampuchea
RCAF	Royal Cambodian Armed Forces
RCN	Royal Cambodian Navy
RFA	Radio Free Asia
SEATO	Southeast Asia Treaty Organization
SNC	Supreme National Council of Cambodia
TIFA	Trade and Investment Framework Agreement
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNTAC	United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia
U.S.	United States
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USPTO	United States Patent and Trademark Office
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
USTR	United States Trade Representative
VCP	Vietnamese Communist Party
VOA	Voice of America
VPA	Vietnamese People's Army
WSJ	Wall Street Journal

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Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1. Background of the Study

Cambodia has had a long history of foreign influences. Cambodia was under French colonialism in Indochina until 1953 when it finally gained independence. 2 years after independence, Cambodia had shown concerns over the ideological rivalry in the region by attending the Bandung Conference in 1955. Along with other African and Asian states, Cambodia expressed its strict neutrality and joined Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) that chose not to join any blocs while it adhered to peaceful co-existence principles (Pradhan, 1979). On top of that, Cambodia also had a separate meeting with the Chinese and North Vietnamese representatives concerning upon the growing expansion of the two countries that might infringe on Cambodia's independence and sovereignty (Ross & Library of Congress, 1990).

Eventually, the region was dragged into an ideological Cold War and Cambodia involved deeply into the war along with its own civil war killing millions of people albeit its neutral stance. After decades of instability, Cambodia finally regained peace through the Paris Peace Agreements in 1991 with the commitment from 19 signatories including the U.S., USSR, China, Thailand, Vietnam, and others ("Agreement on a Comprehensive Political Settlement of the Cambodia Conflict", 1991). Thus, a new government was installed in 1993 under the election prepared by United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC), and Cambodia also

joined ASEAN in 1999. This marks the new era of Cambodia's foreign policy. However, Cambodia has been committing the same neutral foreign policy. As indicated in the 1993 Constitution, "Cambodia adopts a policy of permanent neutrality and non-alignment"¹ (Cambodia const. art. 53).

However, in recent decades, while there is a growing tension in the U.S.-China competition, Cambodia has been seen and criticized as leaning towards China despite its voice of neutral stance. One of the infamous events was the ASEAN Summit in 2012 when Cambodia was the Chair. The summit was failed to issue a joint communique on the case of South China Sea dispute in which Cambodia specifically refused to release statement on the Philippines' Scarborough Shoal case (Hunt, 2012). Simultaneously, political tensions and criticisms arise from the United States and European Union towards Cambodia. At the time of ASEAN Summit in 2012, the U.S. President Obama had a bilateral meeting with Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen in which human rights issues had been used to heavily criticize. It is cited that the President would not have met the Prime Minister nor visited Cambodia should there be no ASEAN Summit (Meckler, 2012). In addition, EU decided to waive 20% of preferential treatment that Cambodia used to enjoy in exporting footwear, garments, and travel goods under "Everything But Arms" (EBA) scheme in 2020 base on human rights concerns (European Commission, 2020).

¹ It is also indicated in Article 53 of Cambodia's Constitution that Cambodia shall not allow any foreign military base in its territory nor building its base abroad, except under the United Nations' framework.

However, in the same year, Cambodia and China rushed to establish Free Trade Agreement marking China as the first country to have bilateral FTA with Cambodia.

As a matter of fact, the U.S.-China great power² competition has affected not only Cambodia, but all 10 ASEAN members are under dilemma of choosing between these two superpowers. Particularly, Southeast Asia, as China's strategic backyard, is now a center of attention since Indo-Pacific region has become a sphere of influence and dominance. Moreover, since the rise of China has become undeniable in recent decades, superpower contestation has been intensified. This is evident in the multifaceted competitive sphere such as U.S.-China trade war, the growing tension in South China Sea and Taiwan Strait along with China's military modernization, and other initiatives to boost regional engagement from both the U.S. and China to name a few. Against this backdrop, ASEAN has put forth ASEAN Centrality by strengthening ASEAN-led mechanisms to ensure its strategic role as can be seen in ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) in 2019. In addition, although each member state has not been explicit in choosing either the U.S. or China, perhaps Shambaugh (2021) best summarized how Southeast Asian states navigate their course between the two great powers which he coined it as "pervasive ambivalence"³. Likewise, while Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar are closely aligned to the Chinese grip, Indonesia and Vietnam have found closer link to the U.S.

² In this research, I use the term "great power" and "superpower" interchangeably.

³ For more detail on Southeast Asian states' "pervasive ambivalence" vis-à-vis the U.S. and China, see Shambaugh, D. (2021). *Where Great Powers Meet: America & China in Southeast Asia*. New York: Oxford University Press.

(Shambaugh, 2021). Noticeably, even countries who are considered the U.S. allies such as Thailand and the Philippines, and to some extent Malaysia recently have been titling towards China, albeit with varying degrees (Shambaugh, 2021). Lastly, Shambaugh (2021) pointed out Brunei and especially Singapore as the countries trying (hard) to balance between the U.S. and China in this superpower rivalry. Notwithstanding, it should be re-emphasized that none of the ASEAN members have entirely relied on one power while ignoring the other side. Moreover, it is indisputable that the rising of China has been largely influencing Southeast Asia.

As being previously mentioned, Cambodia has by far been seen as a Chinese client state. Yet, there are important questions to be answered. Why does it have to be China that Cambodia seeks support from? Does Cambodia really depend on China while ignoring to mend relations with the U.S. and others? Interestingly, Cambodia's trade volume still heavily depends on the U.S. and EU's markets while it faces trade deficit with China (ASEANstats, 2018), although there is a stronger economic interaction between Cambodia and China. Adding to that, what is Cambodia's strategic importance to the two superpowers, and why does China pull Cambodia into its orbit? Therefore, this paper attempts to solve these puzzles by looking into Cambodia's foreign policy between the U.S. and China from its geopolitical viewpoint.

1.2. Purpose and Significance of the Study

As being mentioned above, Cambodia is being scrutinized by the common perception on its strategic stance that seems to favor China or at worst being called as one of the Chinese proxies in the current U.S.-China contestation. However, this claim seems to be contradicting to the country's neutrality and ignoring its relations with others. Despite various articles have been studying and criticizing on Cambodia's foreign policy choices towards China, scholars have been leaving actual in-dept studies on factors that may generate such practices and policy stance. Most importantly, Cambodia's diplomatic history and relations with the U.S. and China have been neglected. Therefore, it would be helpful to comprehend Cambodia's foreign policy from a different lens. This research aims to uncover factors that may push Cambodia to generate policy behavior towards both the U.S. and China by looking into its geopolitics such as geography and proximity as well as its historical experiences with the great powers.

This study is set to shed light on Cambodia's foreign policy stance amid the powerplay of the U.S. and China, and thereby it is significant in three grounds. First, it will fill the gap of literature in addressing strategic stance of Cambodia as a small state linking to its national interests in relation to its neighbors, particularly Thailand and Vietnam. Second, it will serve as a collection of diplomatic history of Cambodia towards the U.S. and China since independence. Third, it can also be a stepping stone for further research that focuses on small state's behavior and policy evolved from

its geopolitics such as geography and history. Most importantly, in the case of Cambodia, this study does not focus only its direct foreign policy towards the U.S. and China, but also taking into account of its neighbors Thailand and Vietnam.

1.3. Research Questions

The main purpose of this research seeks to understand Cambodia's foreign policy by identifying state's position and interests which govern its behaviors amid the great power competition. Thus, the following question must be answered:

1. In what ways Cambodia's foreign policy towards the U.S. and China can be understood through its strategic interests from 1991 to 2021?
 - a. Describing Cambodia's relative power with Thailand and Vietnam in term of geography and proximity
 - b. Understanding the historical experiences of Cambodia towards the U.S. and China after Independence and during Cold War

1.4. Argument

It is argued that Cambodia's foreign policy behaviors towards the U.S. and China are driven by security challenges with its neighbors and past experiences with the superpowers. Regarding its strategic location, Cambodia is in the middle of not only the two great powers, but also the emerging regional powers and neighbors, Thailand and Vietnam. This geographical proximity requires Cambodia to indirect

balancing with both Thailand and Vietnam by finding an alternative regional power to keep the neighbors in check. Likewise, China is deemed fit for Cambodia's quest for survival since it shares strategic interests of minimizing Vietnamese influence in the region. On the other hand, the U.S. capacity in protecting Cambodia from its powerful neighbors remains constraint by geographical and political distance from Cambodia. Moreover, the U.S. have diverged interests with Cambodia while it is a close ally with Thailand and shares the same nemesis with Vietnam. On the other hand, Cambodia may try to avoid choosing side between the superpowers due its policy of neutrality and non-alignment. Yet, it may be limited by the reciprocity shared from the superpowers' perspectives to maintain a neutral stance.

1.5. Research Design

As the objective of this research is to explain Cambodia's foreign policy between the superpower rivalry, it is the most appropriate to answer the research questions with qualitative study through empirical observation. To understand how Cambodia's foreign policy takes on certain stance or leaning towards one side than another, this research will study on the elements that constitutes Cambodia's strategic interests including geography and relative power with its neighbors as well as historical experiences with the superpowers.

Therefore, this research will mainly rely on primary and secondary data sources as a methodological approach to generate qualitative data. The primary data

source is derived from the government including written form, publication, or statement release. It includes official documents (reports), speeches, policy statements, press briefings and releases that can be found on the official website or account of the Cambodian government. However, some may be published in Khmer language which will be translated into English. This data source is used to understand the rationality behind government stance and give possible reason on state's decision-making. It will be a preliminary answer to the questions. Additionally, secondary data is needed in this research to verify government's validity between policy and real behavior. Books, newspapers, journals, websites, and other published sources will be evaluated to explain Cambodia's foreign policy behaviors. Moreover, it will be used to supplement with missing data that could not be found from the government as one of the limitations in this study. Previous research as secondary data source may have a better access to government insight because for example, it may involve with in-depth interview from high-ranking officials that this research is not be able to attain.

Then, the data collected will be used to generate the two elements to identify Cambodia's strategic interests. First, the data are used to evaluate whether the two elements have influence on Cambodia's foreign policy or not. Thus, the analysis will mainly look through Cambodia's relations with the U.S., China, Thailand, and Vietnam along with internal political landscape to determine Cambodia's foreign policy behavior. Statistical data is also used to evaluate potential economic cooperation and benefits that Cambodia receives in relations with superpowers.

Chapter 2. Analytical Framework: Dual Geopolitics

2.1. Literature Review

As this paper seeks to understand Cambodia's foreign policy between the superpowers' powerplay, it is necessary to study how state generates foreign policy. Indeed, foreign policy is regarded as a tool to pursue state's national interests through interactions with other states. Although there is no one rule to this policy analysis, components of geopolitical analysis such as geography and history will be employed as factors influencing foreign policy necessary to the research. In addition, previous literatures regarding Cambodia's relations with the U.S. and China will be described in this section.

2.1.1. Geography

In this era of globalization and modern technology, states have become increasingly interdependence owing to the complex web of interactions. In term of trade, geographical proximity is commonly acknowledged as one of the factors to influence on trade interaction. Similarly, geographical factor may play role in strategizing state's foreign policy as well. As Spykman (1938) emphasized, state's geographical characteristics are "unchanging and unchangeable". Hence, national interests bound to its geography may remain consistent over a long period of time. However, he reiterated that geography is not a determining factor in foreign policy,

but rather, it is a “conditioning” to the policy formulation (Spykman, 1938; Gray, 1991). Moreover, he focused on size and location as main factors in geography. A vastness of territory indicates relative strength of a state and as Spykman (1938) put it, it manifests state’s power of resistance from other states’ pressure and influence national policy choice, particularly in deciding between war and diplomacy. On the other hand, location has been more important than size and it is with reference to “world-location” (land masses and ocean) and “regional-location” (surrounding and other states’ territory) (Spykman, 1938). Although this location remains unchanging, Spykman (1938) mentioned that its significance has changed over time based on two systems of reference which are a “geographic system of reference” describing a physical location and a “historical system of reference” describing values attached to the location.

In addition, Henrikson (2002) measures how distance shapes foreign policy by introducing three main models in which they are described as “practical geopolitics”. First, “gravitational distance” indicates the gravitational pull of bigger power towards smaller states, but this influence could diminish with distance (Henrikson, 2002). However, it should be noted that state’s size is matter when it comes to power projection across distance. Taking the United States as an example of a great power lying between two great oceans, yet it has the ability to exert its sphere of influence on allies and smaller states across the world. Second, Henrikson (2002) discussed on “topological distance” which does not measure proximity by size of a state in comparison to the other counterpart. It takes on the notion that a

third object (mainly state) or space in between the two states would greatly determine their relations. This model is similar to Spykman's argument in term of state's geographical location which indicates "the strategic implications of the interrelationships" between two states (Henrikson, 2002). Yet, these two models do not explain how states across distance and continents come into alliance arrangement. Thus, the scholar introduced another model known as "attributional distance" which states' associated "closeness" or "distance" depends on the geographical "mental maps" categorizing the same or different characteristics of state such as ideology, government regime, and other qualities, etc. (Henrikson, 2002).

2.1.2. Historical Experiences

History has remained relevant in today politics. Through the course of history, scholars and policymakers have developed foreign policy understanding by looking into the past world affairs, ideologies, systems, and governments. By drawing from its implication, historical experiences can help state determine their current and future interaction with the other counterpart. In this respect, Brands and Suri (2015) delve into the relationship between history and foreign policy which they bring up "historical analogies" and "historical sensibility" in the subject matter. Only with critical observation and caution, historical analogies enable us to study the continuity or differences between the past and present (Brands & Suri, 2015). Thereby, it may help policymakers to look up to history for guidance and draw implication from previous actions. In a similar vein, Gray (1994) raises the historical

experiences of the British sea power to evoke strategists to consider on the pattern of continuity to the present. He notes that strategic history is “a saga of how each can be exploited to generate strength for decision” (Gray, 1994).

Nonetheless, it does not mean that we should understand history merely for its facts and being trapped in the past. Instead, Brands and Suri (2015) propound the conviction of historical sensibility as a means for policymakers to obtain the historical knowledge and see “the links between various crises and the potential points of leverage” to initiate a sound policy for the present. Likewise, Schroeder (1996) also mentions that history can guide foreign policy by “not what to do, but what the range of choices and outcomes might be”. As such, it can be noted that history could be a cautionary tale for state to examine their course of policy action to avoid immense repercussion.

2.1.3. Cambodia’s Relations towards Superpowers

Dating back to newly post-independence Cambodia in 1953, Cold War’s rising influence was dominating politics in Indochina. Vietnam is dividing into North Vietnam under the domination of Viet Minh, while the South is allying with the U.S. who tried to secure capitalist ground with the notion of domino theory that if one country fell into communist, Indochina would fall, and the rest would follow. Cambodia was also pressurized from the Cold War’s ideological competition despite neutral stance. After half a century, similar situation is still applicable in Cambodian

context. In the 21st century, the superpower rivalry between China and the U.S. has trapped not only Cambodia, but also other Southeast Asian states in this competition and adopt various policies to balance, bandwagon, or hedging in response to either side. Thus, this section will discuss previous works on Cambodia's policy towards this strategic competition.

There are conflicting perspectives on the state's role in this rivalry due to different methodology and conceptualization. Moreover, limited studies have been done on part of Cambodia's strategic stance over China and the U.S. The most common view on Cambodia's contemporary politics is aligning or bandwagoning with China as it is (or turning to be) one of the Chinese vassal states, while some argue that Cambodia pursues hedging strategy over the rise of China. In this regard, Chanto (2005) regards Cambodia as in between the U.S. and China with its flexible engagement. At the early stage of development, Cambodia needed foreign assistance and sought to sustain economic and political support from both counterparts as long as it does not harm the country's autonomy. With the U.S., Cambodia could access to trade and financial assistance contributing to its economic development, while its interaction with China was still limited due to past experiences, but Cambodia also saw opportunities in engaging with China through ASEAN-China Framework Agreement (Chanto, 2005). In addition, Ciorciari (2010) argues that developing countries in Southeast Asia including Cambodia adopt "limited alignment" in which states prefer a less binding security relationship with superpowers. Thus, the post-conflict Cambodia may lean towards China due to the pull factors such as warding

threat from neighbors, economic and military assistance, but Cambodia is yet reluctant in pursuing strict alignment with China. On top of that, the U.S.'s comparative benefits upon Cambodian economic development are very significant that Cambodia could not catch one while letting go the other despite increasing call for democratization and reform.

However, the changing dynamic in Cambodia's foreign policy seems to be clearer in the last decade. Cambodia has tilted closer towards China as can be seen in the notorious failure of establishing joint communique regarding the South China Sea Dispute during ASEAN Summit 2012 when Cambodia was the Chairman. Simultaneously, there is increasing economic and political interaction between China and Cambodia, while the relations between the U.S. and Cambodia is seen deteriorating. Some have shown concern on Cambodia's overdependence on China that may infringe its national security. Chen and Yang (2013) explain Cambodia's stance in bandwagoning with China for a "win-win partnership". Cambodia sees no threat in this relationship, but instead China has provided economic aid, investment, and military assistance on top of Cambodian regime support. Likewise, Ciorciari (2013) categorizes such relationship as patron and client. China's patronage has drawn Cambodia into its sphere of influence, especially on the elites that depends heavily on China for political consolidation and economic support. In contrast, relation with the U.S. is turning on a wrong wheel. Cambodia has been criticized over its human rights violation and democratic backwardness. Particularly, during Obama's administration, the U.S. has been supporting the opposition party and

promoting for free and fair election in 2013. The U.S. has called on the current government to adhere to democratic principles and promote freedom and human rights while also threatening to reduce assistance in case of serious violation (Var, 2015).

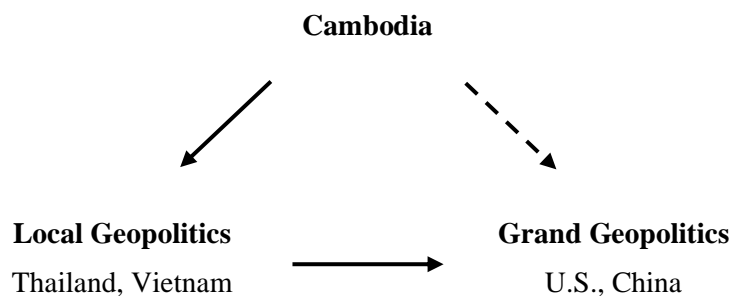
The above studies have only given us one side of the story with less regard to Cambodia's strategic position in between its neighbors that may influence its choices over the superpower's competition for dominance. It has shown us potential benefits and pitfalls that Cambodia has received towards those decisions in term of economics and politics. Therefore, it is helpful to discuss Cambodia's foreign policy from another perspective that may explain differently on why Cambodia chooses certain direction.

2.2. Analytical Framework

This paper will employ "dual geopolitics" or "geopolitical analysis at two levels" to understand Cambodia's foreign policy towards the U.S. and China. To answer the research questions, first it is necessary to understand geopolitics. According to Crikemans (2022), geopolitics can be regarded as a "joint project" of political geography and IR. Thus, he defines geopolitics as a "scientific field of study which investigates the interaction between politically acting actors and their surrounding territoriality" (Crikemans, 2022). However, there are many components of geopolitical analysis such as geographical configuration, natural

resources, boundaries, geopolitical representation, geography of populations, historical factors, economic factors, and strategy of actors (Csurgai, 2022). Indeed, it would take a lot of time and resources to apply each element in this research. Therefore, I will only employ two main components of geopolitical analysis, geographical and historical factors, to describe Cambodia’s strategic interests. In this vein, *dual geopolitics* refers to how Cambodia’s “local geopolitics” with its neighbors (Thailand and Vietnam) shapes its “grand geopolitics” against the great powers (the U.S. and China) (see Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1: Analytical Framework of the Dual Geopolitics of Cambodia



Source: Author

To apply the framework, it is imperative to discuss further on dual geopolitics of Cambodia. As already mentioned, Cambodia’s geopolitics is divided into local geopolitics and grand geopolitics. First, “**local geopolitics**” entails Cambodia’s relations with the two neighbors, Thailand and Vietnam. Not to be

confused with internal politics, it refers to how Cambodia's geography has been largely generating its strategic interests. As Spkyman (1938) mentioned, territory indicates state's relative strength and its power of resistance from other state's pressure. Thus, given its proximity, Cambodia's relative power with Thailand and Vietnam must be assessed. In this case, security challenges between Cambodia and its two neighbors will be raised. Second, "**grand geopolitics**" indicates Cambodia's foreign policy towards the great powers, the U.S. and China. In this regard, historical experiences are discussed and compared with the contemporary interactions between Cambodia and the superpowers. This enables us to obtain knowledge about the past and provide reasoning on the contemporary relations in line with what Brands and Suri (2015) called "historical sensibility". In addition, Cambodia's local geopolitics with Thailand and Vietnam is more fundamental as it plays critical role in shaping its grand geopolitics with the U.S. and China, and which it is indicated in Figure 2.1 by showing a weaker link in grand geopolitics with dotted arrow. Since it is sandwiched between its two neighbors, this pressure prompts Cambodia to seek for a third power to indirect balancing with them.

To facilitate understanding on indirect balancing, I will briefly discuss the schools of thought on balancing and bandwagoning by small states. Simply put, balancing is an act of "opposing the stronger or more threatening side in a conflict" (Schweller, 1998). First, Waltz (1979) posited the realist view on the anarchic international system and thus, balance of power is pursued by weaker state aligning with secondary one against stronger power. On the other hand, Walt (1987) argued

that state does not balance against power but rather, it is the balance of threat in which state perceives other power threatening to its security. The level of threat varies depending on a number of factors such as “aggregate power, geographic proximity, offensive power, and aggressive intentions” (Walt, 1987). In contrast, although balancing is more common, Walt (1987) also suggested that a weaker state tends to bandwagon with a stronger state as an act of appeasement in the case that their tendency to balance against them cannot alter the outcome. Furthermore, Schweller (1994) saw bandwagoning as a positive gain by which state aligns itself with a rising or stronger state and coalition to either “overthrow the status quo” or “enhance system stability”.

In the context of Cambodia, it has been facing with the rising powers, particularly Thailand and Vietnam. As tension and threat increase, it must challenge the status quo to ensure its own survival. Yet, considering that state is rational, direct balancing would be an impractical option for Cambodia since it is the weaker state. Thereby, Cambodia pursues indirect balancing against its two neighbors. In this light, I used a definition from Kuik (2016) which he referred indirect balancing as “to minimize security risks by forging military alignment and increasing armament, but without directly targeting any power, at least not explicitly”. Cambodia, in this case, seeks security alignment with either the U.S. or China aiming at countervailing and limiting its neighbors’ influences.

Therefore, this paper will answer the research questions with the following outline. First, I will identify Cambodia's strategic interests through Cambodia's local geopolitics with Thailand and Vietnam. By that, Cambodia's geography against its two neighbors will be studied throughout its post-Independence until today. Given the proximity, it is unavoidable to assess Cambodia's relative power with its neighbors that may influence its policy decision-making towards the U.S. and China. Thus, I will describe Cambodia's security challenges vis-à-vis Thailand and Vietnam by raising some cases such as border and domestic issues. Second, I will assess Cambodia's grand geopolitics with the U.S. and China. In this regard, Cambodia's historical experiences with the two superpowers during post-Independence and Cold War will be observed as it may provide a significant lesson learnt for Cambodia. Then, the contemporary relations between Cambodia and the two superpowers since 1991 will be studied to understand the status quo of interactions between them. Two main aspects will be investigated such as political relations and military cooperation, and economic relations and development assistance. Cambodia's historical experiences and the current relations with the superpowers will be compared to see any continuity or differences in Cambodia's foreign policy in the strategic powerplay. After identifying Cambodia's strategic interests, I will use Cambodia's dual geopolitical analysis spectrum to describe how Cambodia's foreign policy at grand geopolitical level is shaped by its interactions with its neighbors at local geopolitical level. Hence, two main points will be discussed. First, I will analyze Cambodia's security threats in regard to its neighbors and how the superpowers have come to be

an indirect balancing tool throughout times. Second, I will assess how Cambodia perceive the U.S. and China and vice versa which is bound by geographical distance and historical experiences.

Chapter 3. Local Geopolitics: Identifying Cambodia's Strategic Interests

The first step in answering the research question is to identify Cambodia's strategic interests through local geopolitics. Why does local geopolitics matter? Interpreting Cambodia's local geopolitics will help us understand a rationality behind its foreign policy behavior towards the great powers. Geographical location of a state is constant over a long period of time albeit its size may change. Hence, for better or worse, state must share its fate with neighbor. It also requires state to calculate its strategic moves to secure from the next border's pressure as well as in the region's. Indeed, this induces state to build power and strength for its own security. Cambodia is no different since it must do everything in its power to ensure survival when confronting with threats. Therefore, this chapter will lay out Cambodia's relations with its two neighbors and security challenges that it has been facing due to its geographical location in the region.

3.1. Geography and Proximity

Cambodia locates in Southeast Asia, which is currently in the heart of the strategic space Indo-Pacific. It shares border with Laos to the northeast, Thailand to the west and northwest, and Vietnam to the east (see Figure 3.1). As for relative power, Cambodia may be intimidated by its neighbors since they are regarded as

stronger in term of economic and security. As such, Cambodia’s neighbors have remained playing crucial role in shaping Cambodia’s foreign policy in the post-Independence. Thus, this section will discuss Cambodia’s shared geostrategic location with Thailand and Vietnam.

Figure 3.1: Map of Cambodia



Source: United Nations

3.1.1. Cambodia-Thailand Relations: Troubled Border and Domestic Politics

Cambodia and Thailand's contiguity and relations predated since ancient times. However, the modern relations between both countries dated back when Thailand recognized Cambodia as an associated state under the French Union since 1950. Coupled with long history, Cambodia and Thailand relations are not as close as they are to one another's door. It has been swung by various issues from domestic to geopolitical issues. Evidently, the relations started its unsteady term after Cambodia gained independence in 1953. Thailand who used to provide moderate assistance to Cambodia such as work and scholarship to Cambodian officials prior to independence became unwelcoming to Cambodian King Sihanouk who had embarked on a "Royal Crusade of Independence" (Deth, 2020). Although the current relations between the two countries are at a stable stage along with economic imperatives, nationalism and historical animosity are still lurking behind Cambodia and Thailand. In this part, two main security challenges, territorial issues and domestic politics, will be raised.

First, Cambodia and Thailand's territorial issues have continued to shape the states' relations. In fact, these issues have been there since the French colonization. As Deth (2017) noted, during French colonization of Cambodia between 1863 and 1953, treaties concerning Cambodia and Thailand's borders were signed and they have been used as bases for contemporary borderline. However, interpretation has

been not easy and coupling with nationalism inside Cambodia and Thailand, the Preah Vihear Temple⁴ has stirred disputes between the two states since the 1950s. The dispute over the ownership of the Preah Vihear Temple originated from the legacy of the French as it rooted in the 1904 and 1907 Franco-Siamese Treaty which also mentioned on demarcating borderline between Cambodia and Thailand. However, as issue had escalated, the case was brought upon the International Court of Justice resulted in the 1962 ruling that Preah Vihear located within the boundary of Cambodia and required withdrawal Thai military and police troops from the site (I.C.J. Report, 1962). Nevertheless, border skirmish between Cambodia and Thailand remains an issue and clashing incidents happen occasionally at the border after 1962. Until recent 2008, Cambodia-Thailand border dispute⁵ was breaking out again after Cambodia enlisted Preah Vihear Temple as a UNESCO World Heritage Site⁶.

At one point, this border dispute has challenged the territorial integrity and national security of Cambodia and Thailand (Chap, 2010; Pou, 2013; Var, 2017). As a matter of fact, the dispute resulted in military deployment of both sides, exchanges of fires at the border, and recalling respective ambassadors from each other's soil. On top of that, there was a series of verbal attacks between the top leaders of both

⁴ Preah Vihear Temple (Thai pronunciation: Phra Viharn) is Khmer Ancient temple built in 19th Century AD.

⁵ The case of Cambodia-Thailand border dispute situated along the Dangrek Mountain Range was submitted to the International Court of Justice in 2011. See details in ICJ: <https://www.icj-cij.org/en/case/151>

⁶ See details in UNESCO: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1224/>

countries and the border fighting escalated in 2011 causing many casualties and house destruction and leading to evacuation of people living by the border (Ngoun, 2012). In addition, Cambodia's maritime border with Thailand shares similar situation as the land border, albeit a lesser extent, with an Overlapping Claims Area (OCA). As the situation at the land border escalated in 2009, Thailand revoked the 2001 MOU regarding the Area of their Overlapping Maritime Claims to the Continental Shelf with Cambodia (Thailand Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2009).

Along with territorial issues, domestic politics inside Thailand and to some extent Cambodia have made the relations between the two neighbors worse. Nationalism and historical animosity have greatly influenced the power politics inside Cambodia and Thailand. Simply put, threat perception has been made and politicized accordingly as one political faction rises to power in either Cambodia or more likely Thailand. This can be seen in the case of the 2003 anti-Thai riots. Allegedly, a local Cambodian newspaper *Rasmei Angkor* claimed that a popular Thai actress Suvanan Kongying, also popularly known as Pkay Prek⁷ in Cambodia, had made a remark in an interview questioning the ownership of Cambodia's Angkor Wat Temple (Hinton, 2006). This alleged remark infuriated many Cambodians, and later it was burst into hotter flame by the remark of Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen who commented that "Thief Star (Pkay Prek) was worth less than a blade of grass at Angkor Wat" and "TV channels in Cambodia must reduce or stop showing

⁷ Pkay Prek (in Khmer language) means Morning Star (Venus)

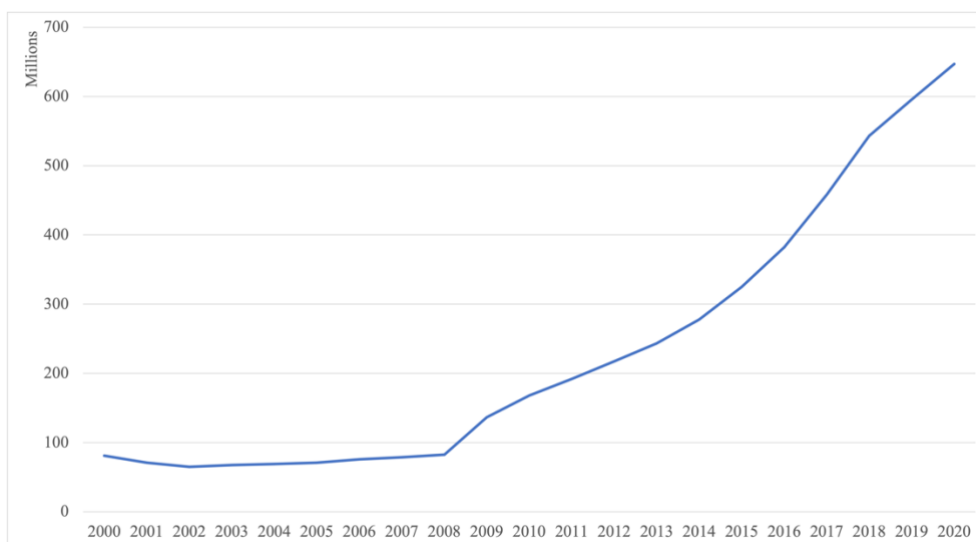
Thai movies, especially movies starring Pkay Prek” (Hinton, 2006). Consequently, many Cambodians took to the street and joined the riots resulting in the burning of Thai embassy and destruction of other Thai business properties in Cambodia. Eventually, the Cambodia-Thailand border was also temporarily closed as well. In analyzing this case, some scholars have brought up nationalism and historical animosity by citing the historical narratives and national identity of Cambodia and Thailand (Kasetsiri, 2003; Hinton, 2006). In contrast, others have pointed on the domestic politics inside both countries. Likewise, Deth (2020) pointed out that the Cambodian authority took no notice of the seriousness of this issue while turning blind eyes on the riots. Instead, a Cambodian government critic and Beehive Radio Station owner Mam Sonando as well as the newspaper editor were arrested for “spreading misleading information, inciting racial hatred, and acerbating the riots”⁸ (ADHOC, 2003, as cited in Deth, 2020). Chachavalpungpun (2010) reinforced that PM Hun Sen politicized relations with Thailand as Cambodia’s national election was coming, and thus, the current rhetoric can be used to divert public attention on government’s inability in dealing with corruption.

On the other hand, Thailand’s internal domestic public has also exacerbated the relations with Cambodia. After the 2006 coup against then PM Thaksin Shinawatra, Thai domestic politics were largely divided and greatly affected its relations with Cambodia. As a matter of fact, Deth (2020) categorized Cambodia as

⁸ See details in ADHOC. (2003). *Monitoring Report on Riots against the Thai Embassy in Phnom Penh* from 29-31 January 2003).

“the hostage of Thai domestic politics from 2008 to 2014. In that regard, when Thailand’s Democratic Party’s PM Abhisit Vejjajiva was in power from 2008 to 2011, border issue and national rhetoric were exerted in an extreme manner to mobilize supports and bolster legitimacy inside the country. As such, previous Thai government was accused of “selling out to Cambodia” in regard to supporting Cambodia in enlisting Preah Vihear as UNESCO World Heritage Site (Deth, 2020). Thus, military tension and clashes were intensified along with frequent exchanges of verbal attacks between Cambodia and Thailand prime ministers. This may have suggested security threat for Cambodia, not to mention that its military power has been at disadvantage in comparing to its neighbor. As a result, Var (2017) argued that Cambodia is prompted to significantly increase its defense budget in response to the security concern. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) (2021), the military expenditure of Cambodia has increased considerably since 2008 (see Figure 3.2). This figure is in line with the tense border situation with Thailand surrounding the Preah Vihear Temple, albeit the Cambodian official’s denial by referring the increase of budget for “personnel salaries and benefits” (Parameswaran, 2015).

Figure 3.2: Cambodia's Military Expenditure from 2000 to 2020 (US\$ millions)



Source: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI)

3.1.2. Cambodia-Vietnam Relations: Asymmetric

Relationship

Cambodia's proximity with Vietnam is also defined by the shared border and relations since ancient times. Bordering by the eastern side of Cambodia, Vietnam was not only a part of Indochina during the French colonization, but it has been also known as Cambodia's traditional alliance. However, the relationship between the two countries is rather complicated which Kry and Chy (2017) categorize Cambodia-Vietnam relations as "bitter-sweet". In term of security defense between Cambodia and Vietnam, it can be viewed positively as the two

governments have been sharing common interests. Yet, like the Thai counterpart, border issues and nationalist sentiment coupling with complex history have been remaining as challenges to Cambodia-Vietnam relations. In addition, Cambodia recently has been seen as breaking away from its traditional alliance as it has been pulled by China's economic gravity (Grossman, 2020).

While it is necessary to delve into their contemporary relations and challenges, historical relations between the two counterparts should not be overlooked. As a matter of fact, geopolitical condition since the Cold War has greatly affected Cambodia's security vis-à-vis Vietnam. After the Independence, Cambodia was immediately dragged into the Cold War's ideological struggle. Particularly in 1954, its neighbor Vietnam was being divided into South Vietnam (Republic of Vietnam) who was backed by the U.S. and North Vietnam (Democratic Republic of Vietnam) who was supported by the communist bloc. Meanwhile, Cambodia was caught up in between the divided Vietnam, but tried to remain neutral in which Cambodia recognized both South Vietnam and North Vietnam in 1956 (Pouvatchy, 1986). However, the Vietnam War was intensified in the 1960s and threatening Cambodia's territorial integrity and sovereignty since Cambodia was concerned with an encroachment on frontier demarcation from both the Vietnamese counterparts. Specifically, the Vietnam War had greatly affected Cambodia, especially the population by the border, and engraved deep anti-Vietnamese sentiment. This can be seen in the use of anti-Vietnamese rhetoric and demonstrations in Cambodia, the ransacking of the embassies of the Provisional Revolutionary Government of South

Vietnam and of the DRVN, and the attempt to root out Vietnamese population from Cambodia after the coup in March 1970 (Pouvatchy, 1986). Furthermore, the anti-Vietnamese sentiment was greatly influenced to the extent that although both Cambodia (took over by the Khmer Rouge⁹) and Vietnam (unified by the North Vietnam) fell into a shared ideology of communism in April 1975, their relations were not friendly but instead hostile. Moreover, border tensions¹⁰ and skirmishes often happened between Cambodia and Vietnam until Cambodia broke off diplomatic relations officially in late 1977 (Pouvatchy, 1986; Kry & Chy, 2017).

Then, what came after was a critical juncture in the relations between Cambodia and Vietnam after a new Vietnamese-backed government installed in Cambodia. To this date, there is still an ambivalence on the rhetoric towards what happened in late 1978. From most western literatures and community, Vietnam indeed launched a full-scale invasion in Cambodia in December 1978 (Morris, 1999). However, the Cambodian and Vietnamese governments have been careful and selective over this discourse. Particularly, Vietnam was known to help building and training the Kampuchea United Front for National Salvation¹¹ (KUFNS) and along with 150,000 Vietnamese troops, the Khmer Rouge regime was officially toppled down on January 7, 1979 (Kry & Chy, 2017). As a result, the People's Republic of

⁹ Khmer Rouge is officially known as "Democratic Kampuchea" (1975-1979).

¹⁰ Border tensions were mainly fueled from territorial disputes which caused frequent border incursions between Democratic Kampuchea and Vietnam.

¹¹ The Kampuchea United Front for National Salvation (KUFNS) was announced on Hanoi Radio on December 3, 1978. See details in Simon, S. W. (1979). Kampuchea: Vietnam's "Vietnam". *Current History*, 77(452), 197-198, 221-223. University of California Press.

Kampuchea (PRK)'s government was backed up by and dependent on the Vietnamese government and advisors which Quinn-Judge (2006) pointed out as the projection of the Vietnamese power structures since PRK's main armed forces, and the Ministry of Interior were under the supervision of the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP). In addition, the Vietnamese military presence was legitimized under the Article 2 of the Vietnam-Kampuchea Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation signed in less than a month after the new PRK government was installed (Simon, 1979; Pouvatthy, 1986). According to Simon (1979) and Morris (1999), Vietnam used this opportunity to not only pacifying the Southwestern border, but also to have a grip on consolidating power in Indochina and "dominate its weaker neighbor". As such, while Cambodia carried on a new fate under the People's Republic of Kampuchea, the Vietnamese troops remained in the country for a decade until being pressured into withdrawal in 1989.

It should be noted that since then, the relations between Cambodia and Vietnam have been strengthened. As a matter of fact, the current government of Cambodia has had a close tie to the Vietnamese counterpart due to the history of liberation from the Khmer Rouge regime where some Cambodian top leaders were in the Kampuchea United Front for National Salvation and trained in Vietnam. Specifically, the current Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen¹² is one of them. As Pouvatthy (1986) put it, it is "a special relationship" between PRK and Vietnam and

¹² See details in Path, K. & Nhem, B. (2021). Vietnam's Military and Political Challenges in Cambodia and the Early Rise of Cambodia's Strongman, Hun Sen, 1977-79. *TRaNS: Trans -Regional and -National Studies of Southeast Asia*, 1-18.

rather of “peculiar nature”. During the time of Vietnamese occupation, Cambodia was deeply connected to Vietnam and there were numerous delegations’ visits and training program from Vietnam as well as agreements of cooperation in various fields. Similarly, HederSource (2018) categorized Cambodia and Vietnam’s contemporary relations as having “special relationship against hostile and unfriendly forces”. Likewise, the two counterparts’ ruling parties, Cambodia’s Cambodian People’s Party (CPP) and Vietnam’s Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV), are closely linked. More specifically, the Vietnam People’s Army (VPA) and Royal Cambodian Armed Forces (RCAF) are the main pillar of their security ties. According to HederSource (2018), Cambodian and Vietnamese governments cooperate under common interests to secure their own regime. For instance, in 2016, the Director of Vietnam’s National Defence Academy mentioned that the security of Vietnam is connected to of Cambodia, and thus, Vietnam’s security can be maintained by helping strengthening Cambodia’s security (HederSource, 2018). This common belief can be traced back to when the communist Khmer Rouge ruled in Cambodia and Vietnamese security was threatened at the border. The same as current situation, the Vietnamese government is concerned of a potential takeover of Cambodia by the opposition party, Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP), that normally uses anti-Vietnamese rhetoric to win popularity. However, the CNRP was only short-lived and finally dissolved by the Cambodian Supreme Court in 2017 (Ben et al., 2017).

Despite this special relationship, there remains other lingering challenges in Cambodia-Vietnam relations. First, both counterparts have been challenged by the border and maritime disputes that also threaten Cambodia's security to some extent. As a matter of fact, these territorial issues are the byproduct of the French colonial legacy and through various regimes, they continue to influence Cambodia-Vietnam relations. Likewise, the border issues were intensified during the Khmer Rouge regime causing border conflicts and retaliations that partly led to the Vietnamese-aided creation of Kampuchea United Front for National Salvation to overthrow the Cambodian communist regime. Then, during the Vietnamese-installed PRK government in Cambodia, a number of border agreements were reached. They are *Treaty on Historical Waters* in 1982, *Treaty on the Principles of Land Settlement* and *the Convention on the Status of the Boundary* in 1983, and *Treaty on the Delimitation of State Border* in 1985 (ratified by PRK in 1986) (Amer, 1997; Thayer, 2012a). However, it should be noted that the status of these agreements was not clear as there was a change in political leadership in Cambodia after 1993. As a result, tension in relations resulting from the border issues has happened occasionally even in the present day. The first instance was in 1994 when the former King Sihanouk of Cambodia accused Vietnam to have moved the boundary marks between the two countries and "nibbling away" Cambodian territory, and then again in 1996, the Cambodian First Prime Minister claimed that three Cambodian provinces had been encroached by Vietnamese farmers who were backed by the troops (Amer, 2017). However, the Vietnamese side handled these boundary issues by rejecting the

accusation and sharing commitment to resolve them. Thereafter, both governments established a Joint Border Commission in 1999, and then in 2005, both signed the Supplementary Treaty to the 1985 Treaty on the Delimitation of the State Border (Kry & Chy, 2017).

Yet oftentimes, these border issues have been politicized and utilized by the opposition party of Cambodia. Likewise, the issues resurfaced again in 2009 when the former opposition party leader Sam Rainsy and his supporters led protest and removed wooden poles on the Vietnamese frontier at the 185th border marker which resulted in legal charges against him (Meas, 2010). Moreover, the opposition party continues to accuse the government of using a “fake map” for Cambodia-Vietnam border and favoring Vietnam in border negotiations (Leng, 2017; Kry & Chy, 2017). This prompted the Royal Government of Cambodia to seek for the original map recognized by the U.N. in 1969 and on the other hand, to prove that Cambodia is independent from Vietnam (Crothers, 2015). In 2016, it was claimed that the Vietnamese side had violated the border by building some infrastructures and military outposts in the “no-man zone”, and both counterparts lately failed to issue a joint statement resolving the issues due to a different usage of reference for starting discussion (Kry & Chy, 2017). In spite of that, Cambodia and Vietnam signed the *Supplementary Treaty to the 1985 Treaty on the Delimitation of the National Boundaries and the 2005 Supplementary Treaty*, and the *Protocol on the Demarcation and Marker Planting of the Land Boundary* in 2019 and so far, they have reached 84% completion of border demarcation (Vu, 2021). On the other hand,

not much has been known regarding the maritime demarcation between Cambodia and Vietnam, and it may not be easy to resolve the remaining boundary challenge.

The second challenge faced between Cambodia and Vietnam is the anti-Vietnamese sentiment in Cambodia. As mentioned previously, it is not a new phenomenon and is an entailment of historical animosity. Anti-Vietnamese rhetoric has been lingering around Cambodian domestic politics, especially being politicized by the opposition party. It is often cited that the current Cambodian ruling party CPP has come to power due to the support from Vietnam since 1980s and thereby, the Cambodian government has been lenient in dealing with Vietnamese-related issues, particularly illegal Ethnic Vietnamese inside Cambodia. Specifically, during the PRK period, there was an influx of Ethnic Vietnamese into Cambodia which raised attention to potential demographic changes and as Pouvatchy (1986) put it, this might “recall certain aspects of past Vietnamization” in the country. Throughout the 1990s, anti-Vietnamese sentiments had deeply rooted in Cambodian society and regarded the Ethnic Vietnamese influx as a threat of Vietnamese expansion (Kry & Chy, 2017), while some members of the Cambodian government also voiced their support for wide-scale repatriation of Ethnic Vietnamese out of Cambodia (Berman, 1996). Noticeably, anti-Vietnamese sentiment is intensified right before national elections as the opposition party tries to gain popularity and support from Cambodian constituents. Another instance was between 1996 and 1998, not only the rhetoric arose, but also violent attacks happened against the Ethnic Vietnamese prior to the second national election (Kry & Chy 2017). In addition, during an election campaign

in 2013, the now-dissolved opposition party CNRP sparked an old flame of anti-Vietnamese rhetoric. The old term “Yuon” has been a xenophobic term in referring to the Vietnamese (Hutt, 2016a). According to Giry (2015), he called it a “Vietnam Syndrome” which is a heated issue in Cambodia and referred to how it has been used to accuse Vietnam on encroaching on Cambodia’s territory as well as the flow of illegal Vietnamese immigration into Cambodia. Therefore, the Cambodia’s ruling party CPP has been more vigilant in dealing with such issues while trying to gain trust from constituents in recent years. As a result, from 2014 to October 2017, roughly 10,000 Vietnamese were deported back home (Board, 2017). Also, in the first half of 2015 alone, the Cambodian government deported 700 illegal immigrants in which 500 of them were Vietnamese nationals while some Vietnamese border guards were detained as they were allegedly regarded as spies who dressed as Cambodian police (Radio Free Asia, 2015). Moreover, in 2021, hundreds of Ethnic Vietnamese families were evicted from their floating houses on the Tonle Sap River in Phnom Penh as the authorities claimed to “clean up” the city since Cambodia will be the ASEAN Chairman in 2022 as well as hosting the SEA Games in 2023 respectively (Hutt, 2021).

Chapter 4. Grand Geopolitics: Cambodia's Foreign Policy with the Great Powers

In the previous chapter, the local geopolitics entails security threats Cambodia have been facing in the post-Independence. As a weaker state, it could not directly balance against its two neighbors. Hence, aligning itself with other power is a feasible scenario. Therefore, this chapter will present Cambodia's grand geopolitics as a mirror reflecting the local geopolitics because it makes sense of why Cambodia pursues its foreign policy with the great powers in a certain way.

At the same time, Cambodia's grand geopolitics is also an independent variable of its own. After asking why Cambodia exhibits foreign policy behaviors vis-à-vis the U.S. and China, the question on why these two great powers pursue their policies towards Cambodia should not be overlooked. In addition, it seems obvious that history indeed repeats itself. While the freshly post-Independence Cambodia was dragged into ideological struggles during the Cold War, the present-day Cambodia are trapped in the superpower rivalry between the U.S. and China. Thus, in order to study Cambodia's relations with both great powers, it is necessary to look back at their past interaction as well. The first two sections of this chapter will deal with Cambodia's relations with the U.S. and China. In each section, I will look at Cambodia's diplomatic history and the current relations with the superpowers by looking at political relations and military cooperation, and economic relations and

development assistance. The last section will focus on the relationship dynamics between Cambodia and the great powers by comparing the past and present relations.

4.1. The United States

4.1.1. Cambodia's Diplomatic History with the United States

The U.S. started recognizing and developing diplomatic relations with Cambodia since 1950¹³ (see Table 4.1). The early encounter between them was subjected to the U.S.'s effort in containing communist spread in Southeast Asia while Cambodia forged close relations with the U.S. for security protection to ward off aggressions from its neighbors (Szaz, 1955; Lasater, 1969). Thus, the U.S. had been sending economic and military aid to the region including Cambodia. Particularly, the U.S. and Cambodia signed a “mutual defense assistance agreement” in December 1950 (Clymer, 2004a). However, this relationship has not been an easy one. As a matter of fact, Cambodia followed its strict neutrality and joined Non-Aligned Movement¹⁴ (NAM) right after its Independence. Thereby, the U.S. might present skepticism to such a country that was not align with it, especially at the peak of the Cold War (Clymer, 1999; Bulut, 2017). Nevertheless, Clymer (1999) further mentioned that the U.S. approach to Cambodia as a neutral state was “unusually flexible” in the 1950s and early of 1960s. In fact, it can be seen that the relations

¹³ It was right after Cambodia gained autonomy within the French Union in February 1950 that the U.S. recognized Cambodia.

¹⁴ Cambodia joined NAM at Bandung Conference in 1955.

between Cambodia and the U.S. were developed “slowly but steadily” (Bulut, 2017). Consequently, the U.S. military assistance was flowing into Cambodia to build and strengthen Cambodian armed forces which both established a Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) along with to be known as one of the highest-level official visits to Cambodia by Secretary of State John Foster Dulles in 1955 (U.S. Embassy in Cambodia, 2010). On top of that, Cambodia-U.S. relations improved as the U.S. provided its assistance to other areas such as infrastructures and education in the same year. Likewise, financial aid was up to US\$50 million per year aiming at economic and social progress (U.S. Embassy in Cambodia, 2010).

Despite that, Cambodia and the U.S. shared quite a troubled relationship. Although the early relations were good, geopolitical condition and Cambodia’s sovereignty issue were still lurking behind them. At that time, Cambodia had to deal with Thailand on the issue of Preah Vihear temple as well as South Vietnam on the territory incursion. It should be noted that both Thailand and South Vietnam were close allies of the U.S., and thereby, the U.S. chose to stay silent and turned a blind eye on the issue (Lasater, 1969). Moreover, Clymer (1999) pointed out that Sihanouk was suspicious of the U.S. and accused that the U.S. supported the Thai and Vietnamese territorial expansion while providing more aids to the two countries than Cambodia. At the same time, Cambodia needs to avoid domestic criticism over military aid from the U.S. while trying to balance Western influence as the country pursued neutrality. As such, Cambodia extended its hand to communist China over the visit of Sihanouk to Peking and US\$22.4 million assistance agreement was

signed between the two countries in 1956 (Lasater, 1969; U.S. Embassy in Cambodia, 2010). Sihanouk’s visit to China was then viewed by Lasater (1969) as a “new phase of neutrality”. Against this backdrop, the U.S. policymakers were debating over the course of Cambodia’s neutrality, and hence, the relations between Cambodia and the U.S. began to exacerbate due to mutual suspicion. Moreover, the diplomatic relations between the two countries took a fall and were officially broken in 1965 despite efforts from both sides (Clymer, 1999; U.S. Embassy in Phnom Penh, 2010).

Table 4.1: A Brief Timeline of Cambodia-U.S. Diplomatic History

Year	Status
1950	Establishment of diplomatic relations and the American Legation in Cambodia
1952	Elevation of status of Legation to Embassy in Cambodia
1965	Diplomatic relations severed
1969	Diplomatic relations re-established and embassy in Cambodia reopened
1975	Diplomatic relations were cut off
1991	Establishment of U.S. Mission in Cambodia
1993	Diplomatic relations officially re-established
1994	U.S. Embassy in Cambodia reopened

Source: Office of the Historian, Foreign Service Institute – U.S. Department of State

It was not until 1969 that the diplomatic relations were restored under President Richard Nixon administration. It was also the time that the U.S.’s secret bombing in Cambodia intensified. As a matter of fact, it was later known to the

public that the U.S. had bombed Cambodia since 1965 under President Lyndon B. Johnson administration in the act of attacking North Vietnamese troops and their military installations across Cambodian border (World Peace Foundation, 2015). Clearly, it was seen as violating Cambodia's sovereignty. Meanwhile, Cambodia was also in the middle of internal political changes. Particularly, Prince Sihanouk was ousted through coup d'état initiated by his trusted general Lon Nol in 1970. The new government under "Khmer Republic" was known to be pro-America and it was speculated that CIA was behind the coup, albeit it has never been proved until now (Clymer, 2004b; U.S. Embassy in Cambodia, 2010). However, the U.S. was quickly to approve the new Cambodian government (Clymer, 2004b) as both counterparts now shared the same enemy, North Vietnam. Consequently, military aid was provided to Cambodia and kept increasing from US\$8.9 million in 1970 to US\$40 million in 1971, while an additional US\$185 million was granted from the U.S. Congress (U.S. Embassy in Cambodia, 2010). Nonetheless, the secret bombing in Cambodia was still proceeding until 1973 when it was revealed to the public. According to Owen & Keirnan (2006), it might be the most heavily bombing operation in history as roughly 2.7 million tons worth of bombs were dropped into Cambodia's territory from 1965 to 1973, more than the amount of the Allies dropped in World War II. Indeed, this destructive bombing campaign had a repercussion over the course of Cambodia-U.S. relations and Cambodia's political atmosphere. The bombing did not root out North Vietnamese forces, but instead pushing them deeper into Cambodian territory. Moreover, the Cambodian populations who were affected

by the campaign ran into the forest and joined the Khmer Rouge insurgent group (Owen & Keirnan, 2006; Bulut, 2017). Coupling the weakness of Lon Nol's Khmer Republic government, the communist Khmer Rouge finally took over on 17 April 1975 and massacre millions of Cambodian citizens over the course of almost 4 years. Once again, the diplomatic relations between Cambodia and the U.S. were completely cut off.

Following the next Vietnamese-backed government People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) installed in Cambodia after 1979, the U.S. denied recognizing PRK as an independent state. As a result, the U.S. and other Western powers pressurized PRK and Vietnam through economic sanctions until the Vietnamese troop withdrawal from Cambodia in 1989 (U.S. Embassy in Cambodia, 2010). Moreover, the civil war in Cambodia finally ended along with the end of Cold War, and hence, in the 1990s, the U.S. and Cambodia relations were re-established and entered a new era.

4.1.2. Cambodia's Relations with the U.S. since 1991: A New Beginning?

a. Political Relations and Military Cooperation

Since the geopolitical landscape shifted in the post-Cold War, Cambodia-U.S. relations took a new trajectory in 1991. It should be noted that by that time, protracted civil wars in Cambodia was finally ended with the Paris Peace

Agreement¹⁵ signed on 23 October 1991. As a matter of fact, the U.S. was one of the 19 states behind this peace conclusion. The normalization of relations began with the U.S. assistance towards Cambodia's rehabilitation period, but as the relations progress, both counterparts are also facing new challenges. Thus, Cambodia-U.S. relations can be divided into 2 periods: early rapprochement and diplomatic friction periods.

Early Rapprochement: 1991 – 2009

As the relations between Cambodia and the U.S. were restored, the U.S. Mission was established in 1991 and followed by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) in the next year which mainly focused on development assistance. Particularly, the rapprochement saw a positive light when the U.S. lifted sanctions and fully re-established diplomatic relations with Cambodia in 1993 when the country was having its first National Election¹⁶ after decade-long conflicts. As a result, the U.S. has been active in assisting Cambodia towards a democratic path with a freely elected government. However, it was not easy as can be seen in the next four

¹⁵ The Paris Peace Agreement concluded with an establishment of United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) with a mission to supervise the ceasefire, ensure foreign forces withdrawal, establish a system of laws and administrative structures, and hold free and fair election in the country.

¹⁶ There were two main parties in Cambodia at that time: the royalist FUNCINPEC led by Prince Norodom Ranariddh and the current ruling party CPP led by Hun Sen. As a result of the 1993 National Election, FUNCINPEC received 45% vote while the CPP received 38%. However, the CPP refused the defeat and hence, both CPP and FUNCINPEC shared power through a new coalition government which Ranariddh was the First Prime Minister and Hun Sen was the Second Prime Minister. For more details, see Chandler, D. (2008). *A History of Cambodia*. Colorado: Westview Press. & Roberts, D. (1994). Notes on Recent Elections: The Cambodian Elections of 1993. *Electoral Studies*, 13(2), 157-16.

years when internal disruption arose inside Cambodia and led to a small setback in the relations with the U.S. In 1997, two main events were raising security alert in the country. The first incident took place during the peaceful demonstration of an opposition party leader Sam Rainsy in March when a grenade attacked occur leading to 20 casualties, and another violent dispute abrupted between the two political factions of whom were loyal to FUNCIPPEC and CPP in June (Chandler, 2008). Consequently, the U.S. in Clinton administration suspended direct aids and decreased numbers of its embassy staffs (U.S. Embassy in Cambodia, 2010) while urging ASEAN to resolve this issue (Clymer, 2004b). In spite of this, the relations between the two countries progressed as Cambodia approached its second National Election in 1998 and CPP led by Hun Sen won the majority votes.

A new millennium finally came, and Cambodia-U.S. relations elevated, particularly in the defense cooperation. In response to the U.S.'s policy of War on Terror after the 9/11 attack, Southeast Asia was framed the second front of combating terrorism and hence, it gave Cambodia an opportunity to collaborate with the U.S. albeit it was not considered as an immediate priority in this policy. Thereby, the U.S. re-engaged Cambodia through easing previous restrictions and facilitating direct military activities between the two countries (Bulut, 2017). For example, the U.S. assisted Cambodia to destroy 233 Soviet-era surface-to-air missiles, a preemption from it falling to the terrorists in 2004 (Thayer, 2010). Moreover, Stern (2009) mentioned that this cooperation enabled Cambodia to adopt "rational approaches to institutional growth, civil-military relations, human rights practices,

and modernizing requirements”. In the following year, security cooperation between the two counterparts gained a momentum. The U.S. finally lifted the 1997 military assistance ban while supporting Cambodia in strengthening border control and counter-terrorism effort through providing material and technical assistances. As such, Cambodian officials received training from the U.S. and participated in the Regional Defence Counter Terrorism Fellowship Program in 2005 (Thayer, 2012b). Noticeably, there were official visits exchanged by Cambodia and the U.S. in next several years. Likewise, Cambodia’s defense chief paid a visit to U.S. Pacific Command (PACOM) in Hawaii and followed by a return visit of PACOM Commander Admiral William Fallon to Cambodia in 2006 under Cambodia’s request to build up Royal Cambodian Armed Forces (RCAF) (Thayer, 2010). In 2007, the U.S. Navy ship *USS Gary* made a historic visit to Cambodia over 30 years which spelled into a progress of defense cooperation between the U.S. and Cambodia (VOA Cambodia, 2007). In the same year, the first Peace Corps volunteers sworn in and served two years by living within Cambodian families throughout the country (U.S. Embassy in Cambodia, 2010). Significantly, financial assistance and the U.S. training programs expanded its scopes in Cambodia in 2008 and 2009. In 2008, US\$4 million was provided for capacity-building of the RCAF in getting ready for the UN peacekeeping operation while 31 trucks and other assistances were given to Cambodia in participating multinational exercises (Thayer, 2012b). Another milestone in military and defense relations was the visit of Defense Minister Tea Banh to Washington and met with Defense Secretary Robert Gates in 2009 as the

two high-ranking officials promised on elevating relations through enhancing RCAF capability (Gold & Vong, 2009). It is also worth noted that Cambodia has been part of the Lower Mekong Initiative (LMI) initiated by the U.S. since 2009 which the program aims at fostering Mekong sub-regional cooperation and capacity building in education, health, and environment.

Nevertheless, the rapprochement was not a smooth ride as human rights issues have been lurking behind Cambodia and U.S. relations. One example could be seen in how Cambodia's Prime Minister Hun Sen mishandled the case of opposition leader Sam Rainsy and civil society activists in 2005. It was reported that the National Assembly removed immunity from 3 main opposition leaders including Sam Rainsy and they also faced criminal charges from the Prime Minister, which it was thought as "a move to get rid of the political opposition in Cambodia" (Human Rights Watch, 2005). As a result, the Prime Minister was pressured to release those civil society activists while Sam Rainsy was pardoned by the King after a visit by Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill coming to assess on the situation. According to Thayer (2010), Cambodia could not afford to stir up its relations with the U.S. as much as to "forestall any cuts in aid by foreign donors". However, human rights-related issues have been a growing concern by the U.S. as the relations progress, and it has inevitably become a hindrance in Cambodia-U.S. relations in the coming years.

A Mix of Cooperation and Strained Relations: 2010 – 2021

As a new decade comes, Cambodia-U.S. relations are presented with both opportunities and hurdles amid the growing U.S-China strategic competition. It could be clearly seen in the year of 2010 when the interactions between the two counterparts were on a mix of positive and negative notes. In April 2010, the U.S. halted shipment of 200 military trucks and trailers to Cambodia as a negative reaction to Cambodia's decision in involuntarily returning a group of ethnic Uighur¹⁷ asylum seekers back to China despite the U.S. protest. It should be noted that Cambodia was also having a border dispute with Thailand at that time. Instead, China stepped in and provided Cambodia with military trucks and uniforms in less than a month after the U.S.'s suspension. In addition, this case prompted the U.S. to introduce the Cambodia Trade Act of 2010 (H.R. 5320) that prohibited the government from forgiving debts owed by Cambodia, particularly since the Lon Nol's Khmer Republic era (1975-1979) (Thayer, 2010, 2012b). In contrast, China again quickly announced that it forgave Cambodia's debt accumulated in the same period. However, this setback did not stop both Cambodia and the U.S. to maintain their relations. In May, the U.S. conducted the first Cooperation and Readiness Afloat Training (CARAT) Exercise with Cambodia to strengthen cooperation between the U.S. Armed Services and the RCAF under maritime security. Moreover, in July, Cambodia co-hosted the first annual large-scale multinational peacekeeping exercise

¹⁷ Uighur is a Muslim ethnic minority who has been reported to be under repression in China.

Angkor Sentinel under US-initiated Global Peacekeeping Operations Initiative (GPOI) with participation from 26 countries, marking as another achievement in Cambodia-U.S. military cooperation (An, 2011; Bulut, 2017). Then, in October 2010, the Secretary of State Hilary Clinton officially visited Cambodia as part of the Asia tour to extend the U.S.'s diplomatic influence in the region. Noticeably, this marked the first time since 2003 that the U.S. Secretary of State had ever visited the country. Indeed, the issues of human rights and China's dependence were being signaled to the Cambodian counterpart, while Cambodia pressed on the cancelation of debt towards the U.S. (Carmichael, 2010). Moreover, in December, the U.S. guided-missile destroyer USS Mustin made a five-day goodwill visit in Cambodia, aiming at deepening relationship between the U.S. and Cambodia through military training and community services projects (Sok, 2010).

However, the relations started to take a turn for worse in 2012 as human rights and democracy continued to be the issues of concern for the U.S. Likewise, during the official visit of the Cambodian Foreign Minister Hor Namhong to Washington, DC. in June 2012, Secretary Clinton again raised human rights issues in Cambodia by asking the government to release 13 female land activists as well as stressing on free election in the upcoming year which she shared concern on the opposition leader Sam Rainsy who was currently living in exile (Radio Free Asia, 2012a). In the same year, President Barack Obama also visited Cambodia for attending the U.S.-ASEAN Summit and East Asian Summit (EAS), marking it as the first visit by the U.S. president in office to the country. Yet, it did not help in

improving the relations as it was reported that the meeting between Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen and President Obama was “tense” since the issues of human rights and political prisoners were slammed on the table (Meckler, 2012). In the following year, Cambodia entered its 5th National Election with a distinctive result which the ruling party CPP only gained 68 seats in the National Assembly, appearing to lose 22 seats. Meanwhile, the opposition party CNRP won 55 seats. As an observer and donor of the election process in Cambodia, the U.S. State Department then reported that the voting process was “fraught with irregularities” albeit the election was “mostly peaceful and largely free of intimidation” (Lum, 2015). It should be noted that the U.S. was known to have good connections with the opposition party leaders and local NGOs, particularly in term of human rights, civil liberties, and democracy. Thereby, it could easily become a political scapegoat as an intervening third party in Cambodia’s domestic politics. As a result, the relations between Cambodia and the U.S. have worsen over the years as the U.S. increases voicing criticism towards Cambodia’s domestic politics. In 2015, Cambodian government passed the Law¹⁸ on Association and Non-Governmental Organizations (LANGO) to regulate and formally recognize association and NGOs in Cambodia. In turn, this move was criticized as a crackdown on government critics and civil society with “restriction on political and social activism, civil society, free speech, and foreign-funded democracy programs” (Lum, 2018).

¹⁸ For more detail on LANGO, see https://cambodia.ohchr.org/~cambodiaohchr/sites/default/files/Unofficial_Translation_of_5th_LANGO_ENG.pdf

It was until 2017 that Cambodia's relations with the U.S. hit the lowest point of friction. In January, Cambodia suspended an annual joint military drill Angkor Sentinel with the U.S. by claiming to take time preparing for the communal election in June. Then, in February, the Cambodian government made an amendment on Law on Political Parties that gave the government the authority to define legitimacy of political parties' activities or to dissolve them. The U.S. counterpart thus quickly reacted through a statement pointing out the restriction of freedom of expression and calling on the Cambodian government to ensure free and transparency in the upcoming elections (U.S. Embassy in Cambodia, 2017a). After that, Cambodia also halted the Seabees program under the U.S. Navy Mobile Construction Battalion along with the cancellation of 20 planned project. It was speculated that the strained relations were resulted from the U.S. criticism towards the Cambodia's Law on Political Parties and the Cambodia's continued demand on cancellation of past-era debts (Prak, 2017). Then, the tension exacerbated when the Cambodian government expelled the U.S.-based NGO National Democratic Institute (NDI) in September 2017. Moreover, the government also began to crack down on local radio stations and newspaper outlets including The Cambodia Daily, Voice of America (VOA), and Radio Free Asia (RFA). At the same time, the opposition party CNRP President Kem Sokha was arrested with charge of inciting the "color revolution" and committing treason. It was no other than the U.S. that Kem Sokha was accused to be colluding with which the CIA-backed conspiracy was brought up (Cochrane, 2017). In response, the U.S. Ambassador in Cambodia William A. Heidt made an open

statement by rejecting the accusation of conspiring with the opposition party and calling this allegation as “intentionally inaccurate, misleading and baseless accusations” (U.S. Embassy in Cambodia, 2017b). As such, the diplomatic row began to hit back and forth between Cambodia and the U.S. First, Cambodia suspended its cooperation of receiving Cambodian deportees under the 2002 agreement with the U.S. by citing humanitarian concerns. On the other hand, this prompted the Department of Homeland Security to announce the visa sanctions¹⁹ on Cambodia’s foreign ministry officials, citing the uncooperative manner of government to receive the returnees (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2017). At the same time, the U.S. Embassy in Cambodia also released security message to alert the U.S. citizen in the light of anti-American rhetoric. In retaliation, Prime Minister Hun Sen ordered a halt to assist and repatriate the remains of the U.S. soldier missing-in-action (MIA) during the Vietnam War (Mech & Handley, 2015). As Cambodia’s domestic politics exacerbated, the tension between Cambodia and the U.S. were rising. Likewise, Cambodian Supreme Court dissolved the opposition party CNRP, the U.S. Senate reacted by passing S.Res.279 resolution²⁰ in 115th Congress to urge the Department of the Treasury to block asset of top Cambodian government officials in effort to promote democracy, human rights, and rule of law in Cambodia. On top of that, the U.S. announced the withdrawal of US\$1.8 million fund to National Election Committee in Cambodia as the Press Secretary Sarah

¹⁹ The visa sanction includes the B visas (temporary visitors for business or pleasure) for Cambodian Ministry of Foreign Affairs officials with the rank of Director General and above as well their families.

²⁰ The detail of S.Res.279 Resolution could be found in the Library of Congress via <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/senate-resolution/279/text>

Huckabee Sanders anticipated that the next year 2018 national election “will not be legitimate, free, or fair” after the CNRP was dissolved (Mech & Reddick, 2017). In December, the U.S. also imposed visa restrictions on individuals responsible for undermining Cambodian democracy, another attempt to pressurize the government in releasing the opposition leader Kem Sokha and calling for freedom of civil society and independent media (Nauert, 2017). Yet, it is also noteworthy that although there were tensions, the U.S. and Cambodia continued to cooperate in different areas including the U.S. foreign assistance programs, clearing unexploded ordnance, limited military assistance and cooperation, and naval port visits (Lum, 2018).

Noticeably, after the Cambodian ruling party CPP won a landslide victory with 125 seats in the National Assembly in July 2018, the Cambodian government adjusted attitude to ease tension in relations despite the White House’s negative reaction towards the election process as “the flawed elections” (Sok, 2018). Likewise, in November, the Minister of Information Khieu Kanharith mentioned to Ambassador William A. Heidt that the government had intended to permit Radio Free Asia (RFA) and Voice of America (VOA) to reopen to promote freedom of press in Cambodia (Niem, 2018). Later in 2019, VOA was permitted license to go on air by the Ministry of Information. At the same time, it seems that the U.S. was changing its trajectory towards accommodating Cambodia as well. In October 2019, a new Ambassador W. Patrick Murphy was appointed to Cambodia. Bong (2019) mentioned that the appointment of one of the most senior Southeast Asian experts at the State Department to Cambodia perhaps indicates the U.S.’s growing attention

towards Cambodia. In turn, the Ambassador Murphy was receiving a more welcoming remark from the Cambodian government. Particularly, after Prime Minister Hun Sen met with the Ambassador, he advised officials to further strengthening relations with the U.S. and planned on co-hosting the 70th anniversary of Cambodia-U.S. diplomatic relations in the following years (Fresh News, 2019a). Bong (2019) further added that this positive gesture could be regarded as “an intentional move towards détente” by both Cambodia and the U.S., albeit it is yet unclear whether this is Hun Sen’s strategy to dodge Western pressure or his effort in balancing with overdependence on China. On another note, the opposition leader Kem Sokha was released from the house arrest after 2 years and met with the U.S. Ambassador. Thus, this could further put Cambodia on a positive light with the U.S. As such, in the same week, Ambassador Murphy met with Minister of National Defense General Tea Banh and both agreed to increase military cooperation with the resumption of joint military exercises as well as allowing the U.S. naval vessels to resume docking in the country’s coast (Mech, 2019a). In addition, entering the 2020 pandemic year saw a positive interaction between Cambodia and the U.S. In early February, Cambodia was praised with its humanitarian act by allowing Holland America MS Westerdam cruise ship which carried more than 2,000 people on board to dock in Cambodia’s port despite COVID-19 and after rejection from other countries. As a result, President Donald Trump personally tweeted his appreciation towards Cambodia which some noticed that it was a rare occasion of a message sent to China’s closest ally (Reuters, 2020). Also, it should be noted that the U.S. worked

actively in helping Cambodia response to COVID-19 in that year through both financial assistance and donation. As of July 2021, the U.S. has donated more than 1 million COVID-19 vaccines through COVAX Facility to help combat the pandemic in Cambodia (U.S. Department of State, n.d.).

On the other hand, uncertainty and mistrust yet remains as an impediment to the effort of revitalizing Cambodia-U.S. relations. In 2019, The Wall Street Journal (WSJ) reported that Cambodian government had allegedly signed a secret deal to allow China building naval outpost and gaining military access to Cambodia's Ream Naval Base²¹ as part of China's power projection in Southeast Asia (Page et al., 2019). Other areas such as the construction of Cambodia's airport at Dara Sakor by the Chinese company were also speculated to potentially be a future runway turns for Chinese military aircrafts. However, both Cambodia and China have repeatedly denied such allegations. In response, the Ministry of National Defense invited some 70 national and international journalists to inspect the Ream Naval Base, and as a result, there were no signs of foreign military presence like the WSJ's claim (Mech, 2019b). Cambodia was also able to briefly dispel doubt from the U.S. counterpart as the Secretary of State Mike Pompeo was seen to praise Cambodia for "protecting its sovereignty" in U.S.-ASEAN summit later that year. Yet, speculations continue to stand between the two countries as Cambodia is seen to keep leaning on China. In June 2021, Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman made an official visit to

²¹ It is worth noted that there were U.S.-funded facilities in Ream Naval Base as well. However, the facilities were later being demolished and moved to allow "further infrastructure development and security enhancement".

Cambodia and again raised concerns on the possibility of China's military presence at Cambodia's Ream Naval Base which would "undermine its sovereignty, threaten regional security, and negatively impact U.S.-Cambodia relations" (U.S. Department of State, 2021). The Cambodia counterpart made an effort to compromise and build trust with the U.S. by inviting the U.S. defense attaché Colonel Marcus M. Ferrara to visit the Ream Naval Base. Unfortunately, it did not clear mistrust between the two countries as during the visit, it was reported that Cambodia refused to give the U.S. full access to inspect the naval base (Reuters, 2021). In addition, 2021 ended with the U.S.'s latest arms embargo on Cambodia in December by pressing on corruption, human rights abuses, and the growing ties with China (Strangio, 2021a), which ironically would push Cambodia further into the Chinese orbit rather than pulling it away.

b. Economic Relations and Development Assistance

After the conclusion of Paris Peace Agreements in 1991, the U.S. resumed diplomatic relations as well as ending economic sanctions towards Cambodia. Despite the bitter-sweet relations, the U.S. also became the largest trading partner of Cambodia. It is only until recently that its top trading status with Cambodia got beaten by China.

Bilateral Trade and Foreign Direct Investment

In contrast to political relations, Cambodia has been benefited from trade relations with the U.S. Likewise, the U.S. has been the top largest export partner of Cambodia, particularly in garments and textiles. The bilateral trades started off in 1992 with Cambodia mainly imported goods from the U.S. as the country rebuilt itself. According to U.S. Census Bureau (n.d.), Cambodia imported US\$16 million worth of goods from the U.S. while it exported only US\$0.1 million to the U.S. in 1992. However, the trade figure has changed as Cambodia has been exporting more and gaining trade leverage with the U.S. over the years. This owed to cooperation between the two governments as Cambodia was transitioning into market economy. As a result, in 1996, the U.S. and Cambodia signed an Agreement on Trade Relations and Intellectual Property Rights Protection²², and Cambodia was granted Normal Trade Relations (NTR) status which subjected to normal tariff treatment with the U.S. In 1997, Cambodia started to gain trade surplus from the U.S. as Cambodia exported a total of US\$103 million while imported goods from the U.S. only worth of US\$18.8 million (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.). Moreover, both governments signed Bilateral Textile Agreement in 1999 over the period of 3 years to give Cambodia more access to the U.S. market under the condition that it substantially adheres to international labor practices in the garment industry (Sayres & Lum, 2002). Upon reaching the deadline, Bilateral Textile Agreement was extended in 2002 to give

²² Also known as Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA)

extension of another 3 years until 2004 as Cambodia had made progress in improving labor condition in the country.

Consequently, Cambodia's export to the U.S. reached more than US\$1 billion by 2003 (see Table 4.2), a significant increase as compared to when it started in 1992. Since then, the trade volume has grown steadily in the last decades, but it should be noted that the U.S.'s import figure to Cambodia yet remained flat. Additionally, as the relations progressed, both countries made effort in boosting economic interactions by reaching deal on Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA) in 2006. Thus, under TIFA, U.S.-Cambodia Joint Council on Trade and Investment was established and chaired by the Ministry of Commerce and the United States Trade Representative (USTR) to discuss on issues related to intellectual property and financial services as well as helping Cambodia in its economic reforms in line with the WTO standards²³ (Thayer, 2012b; Bulut, 2017). A decade later, the two governments sign an Agreement to Improve International Tax Compliance and to Implement FATCA²⁴ in 2015. Within that year, Cambodia's export to the U.S. reached US\$2.1 billion whereas the U.S.'s import to Cambodia stood at US\$218 million. It should be noted that Cambodia's main export products to the U.S. are knit apparel, leather products, woven apparel, furniture and bedding, and footwear. In turn, Cambodia's import goods from the U.S. are vehicles, machinery, copper, food waste, animal feed, and nonwoven textiles (Office of the

²³ Cambodia joined WTO in 2004.

²⁴ FATCA stands for Foreign Account Tax Compliance Act which introduces a reporting regime for financial institutions.

United States Trade Representative, n.d.). Interestingly, the bilateral relations between Cambodia and the U.S. have been pragmatic, albeit their rocky diplomatic relations. As can be seen in Table 3, Cambodia’s goods trade with the U.S. reached its peak in 2020 with the increase of Cambodia’s export reaching 5 folds in comparison to 2003.

Table 4.2: Cambodia’s Goods Trade with the United States (US\$ millions)

	2003	2006	2009	2012	2015	2018	2020
Export	1128	1876	1553	1555	2156	3044	5340
Import	93	24	91	162	218	266	245
Balance	1035	1852	1462	1393	1938	2778	5095

Source: ASEANstats

On the other hand, the annual flow of U.S.’s FDI into Cambodia remains limited, compared to China’s. Likewise, the FDI stocks accounted for US\$422 million in 2014 and only slightly increased to US\$749 million in 2020 (see Table 4.3). Former U.S. Ambassador to Cambodia Todd (2013) mentioned several factors such as corruption, structural weaknesses, and high infrastructure costs that hinder the U.S.’s investment into the country. However, to help boost investment and protect the U.S. patent, Cambodia and the U.S. signed a Memorandum of Understanding on Bilateral Intellectual Property Cooperation between the Ministry

of Industry, Science, Technology and Innovation (MISTI) and the United States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO). The MOU is set to be valid for 5 years from the signing date in 2020.

Table 4.3: United States' FDI Stocks in Cambodia (US\$ millions)

2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
422	417	495	563	565	672	749

Source: ASEANstats

Development Assistance

After the establishment of U.S. Mission in the country in 1991, the U.S. also resumed its development assistance towards Cambodia for its rehabilitation period. Likewise, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) re-established its permanent mission to Cambodia in 1992 aiming at rebuilding roads, supplying the basic humanitarian needs, and improving health and education. It is worth noted that the USAID's budget for Cambodia in the 1990s was approximately US\$264 million, while the U.S. also provided financial assistance worth 30% of UNTAC's budget to Cambodia (U.S. Embassy in Cambodia, 2010). However, as internal disruption occurred in 1997, the U.S. government decided to ban direct aids to Cambodia to pressure Hun Sen's government, but other assistances to NGOs and for

humanitarian purposes remained in place (Bulut, 2017). It was only until 2007 that the ban was lifted, and by that year, Cambodia became the 3rd largest recipient of the U.S.’s ODA in East Asia and the Pacific after Indonesia and the Philippines (Thayer, 2012b). However, in the last 2 decades, it seems that the U.S.’s ODA flow into Cambodia remains steady which in 2003, the U.S. provided US\$72.2 million, and it barely increased in 2019 with the total amount of US\$90.2 million (see Table 4.4).

Table 4.4: United States’ ODA Flow into Cambodia (US\$ millions)

2003	2006	2009	2012	2015	2018	2019
72.2	74.2	81.2	98.1	92.9	104.7	90.2

Source: OECD

It should be noted that unlike the Chinese aid, the U.S. aid mainly comes with conditionality such as democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. Likewise, the U.S. financial assistance to Cambodia is constraint by the country’s domestic affairs. Aside from that, other areas such as basic education, poverty, health, agricultural and sustainable development, and clearance of unexploded ordnance are the focus of the U.S. development assistance (Lum, 2020). Moreover, most of the assistance has been channeled through NGOs. In recent years, as the domestic situation in Cambodia seems to be deteriorated, the U.S. government has been strict

in providing financial assistance to the country. In 2013, the U.S. lawmakers warned that the government would cut financial assistance to Cambodia if the upcoming national election did not meet its free and fair criteria (Bulut, 2017). By 2015, Cambodia became the 5th largest recipient of the U.S.'s ODA in Southeast Asia after Indonesia, the Philippines, Vietnam, and Myanmar (Lum, 2015). In addition, the U.S. continues to attach conditions over its foreign assistance as can be seen in the Further Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2020 (P.L. 116-94) which stated that Cambodia would not be able to receive any funding assistance if it undermines regional security and stability. This includes territorial disputes in the South China Sea, Cambodia's sovereignty vis-à-vis the influence of China and the neutrality of Ream Naval Base, and respect of "the rights, freedoms, and responsibilities enshrined in the Constitution of the Kingdom of Cambodia as enacted in 1993" (Lum, 2020).

4.2. China

Cambodia's encounter with China happened beyond modern history and dated back as early as the late 12th century. However, the Sino-Cambodia relations have been overshadowed by contemporary politics in the last decades. Some scholars pointed out that Cambodia have been drawn into the Chinese orbit and influence (Ciorciari, 2013; O'Neill, 2020; Shambaugh, 2021). This common view has been intensified largely after the failure of ASEAN to issue a joint communique in South China Sea dispute when Cambodia was the chairman in 2012. Yet, it overlooks the diplomatic interactions between China and Cambodia over the course of history and

strategic interests which may contribute to the current trajectory. Therefore, this part will focus on Cambodia's diplomatic history as well as current relations with China.

4.2.1. Cambodia's Diplomatic History with China

After Cambodia was granted internal autonomy from the French, (Republic of) China established its consulate²⁵ in Phnom Penh in 1947. Yet, it was only after the People's Republic of China²⁶ (PRC) preceded over the government that Cambodia and China started to encounter more frequently. The first interaction was during the Geneva Conference in 1954 when the Chinese Premier and Foreign Minister Zhou Enlai came to discover Cambodia²⁷. At first, the Cambodian counterpart had rather shown hostility and suspicion towards China under the premise that the Chinese supported the Viet Minh and was "indirectly responsible for the Viet Minh presence" (Richardson, 2005). However, Cambodia's impression towards China had changed after the Chinese had shown support towards Cambodia's neutrality and on top of that, supported the withdrawal of Viet Minh troops from Cambodia and Laos (Zhai, 1992; Richardson, 2005). Interestingly, the starting point of closer relations between Cambodia and China was when the two countries' leaders first met on the sideline of Bandung Conference in 1955. It was

²⁵ At that time, there were already flows of Chinese migrants doing business in Cambodia. See details in Young, S. (2019). Patronage and Clientelism of Chinese Investment in Cambodia. *Research Brief* (11), 1-7.

²⁶ People's Republic of China preceded Republic of China in 1949.

²⁷ This came as a surprise since the Chinese foreign policy makers had previously viewed Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam as Indochina, but not as distinctive independent states.

reported that the Cambodian King Norodom Sihanouk and the Chinese Premier had built “an excellent rapport” during their first encounter (Chanda, 2010). It should be noted that the relationship between the two countries were based on reciprocity and calculation within the geopolitical condition at that time. Likewise, although Sihanouk aligned with the U.S. for security, suspicion and frustration started to grow when the U.S. chose to stay silent over the Cambodian border incursions from Thailand and South Vietnam. In addition, Cambodia needs to avoid domestic criticism over military aid²⁸ from the U.S. while trying to balance Western influence as the country was pursuing neutrality. Consequently, its balancing policy would be extending its hand to China. On the Chinese side, although Cambodia was a small country, it proved its significance in the Chinese policy. First, China was able to keep Cambodia as a neutralist state out of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) which was the U.S.-backed anti-communist alliance (Richardson, 2010). Second, China could also keep its Southern neighbor Vietnam in check by ensuring that Cambodia was independent from the Vietnamese grip over Indochina (Chanda, 2010).

As a result, Sihanouk paid an official visit to Peking for the first time in February 1956 (see Table 4.5). Sihanouk was indeed warmly welcomed by the communist counterpart during the visit and after that, Zhou Enlai also made a return visit to Cambodia in November 1956 (Richardson, 2005). As a proof of this

²⁸ Cambodia signed a military aid agreement with the U.S. in May 1955, a month after the Bandung Conference.

normalization of relations, US\$22.4 million assistance agreement was signed between the two (Lasater, 1969). After that, both sides had shared exchanges of visits throughout the years. Significantly, Cambodia fully recognized and established its official diplomatic relations with China in 1958, despite the U.S.'s disagreement and internal concern that Sihanouk tilted too close to China. It should be noted that as Cambodia's relations with China began to elevate, its relations with the U.S. went in an opposition direction and deteriorated. In the first half of the 1960s, Sino-Cambodia relations remained fruitful with mutual respect and flows of assistance to Cambodia. Another striking point was the diplomatic gestures sharing between Cambodia and China were quite different from that of the U.S. According to Richardson (2005), the Cambodian and Chinese leaders have sought to perform "diplomatic ritual" well which involved frequent exchange of visits, phone calls, and praises or congratulations on special occasions. Moreover, the Chinese view towards Cambodia was that of humbleness and respect²⁹, which was in a stark contrast to the U.S. According to a report "Psychological Operations: Cambodia", Cambodia was given an impression of backwardness and weak since the report mentioned Cambodians as "docile passive people" (Shawcross, 1979). In another aspect, China had been showing keen supports towards Cambodia's neutrality as well as reiterating the threats of encroachments from Thailand and South Vietnam into Cambodian territory. As such, fearing that it would be trapped by the current geopolitical condition in Indochina, Cambodia called on international conference that would

²⁹ In one interview, a former political officer was asked to describe Phnom Penh and his answer was "Far more pleasant than my hometown in Guizhou" (Richardson, 2005).

again ensure Cambodia’s neutrality in 1962 (Liefer, 1963). In this regard, Zhou Enlai responded positively on behalf of the Chinese government to support Cambodia against “foreign aggression” (Richardson, 2005) which was opposite from the U.S.

Table 4.5: A Brief Timeline of Cambodia-China Diplomatic History

Year	Status
1956	Relations normalized, following the visit of Sihanouk to Peking
1958	Establishment of official diplomatic relations
1966	Diplomatic relations deteriorated after early phase of the Cultural Revolution
1969	Diplomatic relations normalized
1970	China hosted Sihanouk's government in exile in Beijing
1979	Chinese diplomats withdrew to Thailand, following the collapse of Khmer Rouge
1991	Diplomatic relations normalized

Source: Author’s compilation

Unexpectedly, the rest of the 1960s was faced with a decline in relations between Cambodia and China. It was partly due to the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution³⁰ in China which took on revolutionary and hardline approach against the capitalist. In this light, China’s peaceful behavior towards supporting neutral state changed its discourse (Richardson, 2005). At the same time, Sihanouk began to fear the grow of the Cambodian leftist and be convinced that China was behind the

³⁰ Also known as “Cultural Revolution” led by Mao Zedong from 1966 until 1976.

support of this radical left. It was until 1969 that the relations were normalized. However, it was worth noted that right before their normalization, Cambodia had already turned over to the U.S. Unfortunately, Sihanouk was ousted under the coup against him in March 1970 with a new Lon Nol's Khmer Republic government who was known to be pro-America. While the interaction between China and the new government remained minimal, China instead fully supported Sihanouk as the legitimate Head of State. On top of that, China was hosting Sihanouk's government in exile in Beijing while facilitating the coalition between Sihanouk's force and Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge known as the National United Front of Kampuchea (NUFK) (Hood, 1990; Richardson, 2005). Meanwhile, the U.S. bombing campaign persisted across Cambodian border to root out North Vietnamese forces. Yet instead, it endorsed the Khmer Rouge power and popularity by driving citizens who were hurt by the regime and the U.S.'s bombing into joining the Khmer Rouge forces. Hence, Lon Nol's Khmer Republic fell in April 1975, whereas the Khmer Rouge took over which turned out to be the onset of genocide regime.

It is worthy to note that the 1970s entailed geopolitical power struggle among various actors such as the Sino-Soviet split since 1960, the Sino-U.S. détente³¹ in 1972, the U.S.'s lost in Vietnam War in 1973, the Saigon Fall in 1975, and lastly the Khmer Rouge in 1975. After the retreat of the U.S. presence in Indochina, there left the Khmer Rouge who was backed by China while the

³¹ This shook the relations between China and North Vietnam. Even after Vietnam was unified in 1975, the relations began to deteriorate which could be one factor pushing Soviet and Vietnam closer.

communist Vietnam was backed by the Soviet. Following the communist victory, the Khmer Rouge followed radical Maoism and developed deep hatred towards its communist neighbor Vietnam which historical animosity and territorial issues largely played their roles. Therefore, the Khmer Rouge needed to build its own strength to battle against the Vietnamese that intensified in 1977. As such, China had been a great supporter towards the regime by providing military aids and advisors into the country (Chanda, 2002; Richardson, 2005). Some have argued that China intended to tame Vietnam's expansionist ambition, influence, and provocation by backing up the Khmer Rouge (Chanda, 2002; Richardson, 2005; Gosha, 2006). However, the Khmer Rouge was short-lived as Vietnam launched a full-scale invasion in Cambodia in late 1978 under the Kampuchea United Front for National Salvation (KUFNS). As a result, Vietnam-backed government, the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK), was installed after January 1979. On the Chinese side, this was an unacceptable act, and in retaliation, China launched a "punitive invasion" on Vietnam which appeared to be "teaching Hanoi a lesson" (Hood, 1990; Morris, 1999).

Following the new government installed in Cambodia, China did not recognize the government's legitimacy. Along with others, China also kept pressuring the Vietnamese troops to withdraw from Cambodia. The Vietnamese troops was out of Phnom Penh by 1989 which appeared to be China's success in confrontation with Vietnam. As the Cambodian conflicts were finally ended, Sino-Cambodia relations also turned into a new era starting in the 1990s.

4.2.2. Cambodia's Relations with the China since 1991: An Old Friend

a. Political Relations and Military Cooperation

After the Paris Peace Agreement in 1991, China and Cambodia have worked to build each other's trust. Particularly, Hun Sen indeed was not fond of China at first as the history entailed its involvement in the Khmer Rouge regime resulting in devastating genocide. Meanwhile, China distrusted the new government since Hun Sen was once a protégé of Vietnam. Yet, the Cambodian government needed strength to build the new government from scratch while bearing the Western pressure of democracy installed in Cambodia. At the same time, China is seeking to project its influence in Southeast Asia. Therefore, in the next three decades, Cambodia and China reconnect under reciprocal relationship based on their own calculation of benefits.

Early Rapprochement and Building Trust: 1991 – 2009

The early start of relations was seen to be a cautious move between China and Cambodia. Particularly, China ceased its support to the Khmer Rouge and encourage national reconciliation among all factions in Cambodia. It should be noted that China actively involved in Cambodia's peace process and was one of the 19 signatories in the 1991 Peace Accords ending conflicts in Cambodia. Likewise, the Chinese government rushed to normalize diplomatic relations with Cambodia by

appointing a Permanent Representative to the Supreme National Council of Cambodia (SNC)³² in November 1991 (Jeldres, 2012). By that time, although China still somewhat saw the Cambodian People's Party (CPP) as Vietnam's puppet, it could not ignore the fact that CPP was in control of the country and opened its arm for its former enemy's protégé. In addition, China also helped Cambodia in rehabilitation process as it was reported that at least US\$250 million in aids was provided in 1992 (Richardson, 2005). Result of the 1993 National Election perhaps made China to be extra cautious of how to approach Cambodia since there are partisan government with first Prime Minister from FUNCINPEC and second Prime Minister from CPP. Thereby, it may be smart to keep both CPP and FUNCINPEC at arm's length and wait to see further development. However, Hun Sen's CPP was very active and quick to establish a good tie with the CCP whereas Prince Ranariddh's FUNCINPEC was quite slow for this move. At the same time, China remained seeing King Sihanouk as significance and always hosted him which the King spent about "a third of his time" in China (Richardson, 2005). A CPP-FUNCINPEC showdown in July 1997 perhaps decided the direction of Sino-Cambodia rapprochement. While the Western community and ASEAN categorized the 1997 event as coup by Hun Sen, China perceived it differently and reiterated the policy of non-interference in Cambodia's domestic affair while urging Cambodians

³² Supreme National Council of Cambodia (SNC) is a unique legitimate body and source of authority in which, throughout the transitional period, the sovereignty, independence, and unity of Cambodia are enshrined. See detail in Agreement on a Comprehensive Political Settlement of the Cambodia Conflict, Oct. 23, 1991, [ST/DPI/1180. Retrieved from https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/file/resources/collections/peace_agreements/agree_comppol_10231991.pdf

to solve their issue (Chanda, 2002; Richardson, 2005). Moreover, while others posed sanction and ceased military aid, China instead jumped in and signed an agreement for law-enforcement training assistance in August 1997 (Marks, 2000) and later delivered “116 military cargo trucks and 70 jeeps” to Cambodia in December that year (Jeldres, 2012). In 1999, Cambodia’s Co-Defense Ministers, Tea Banh and Prince Sisowath Sirirath, were invited to China under Chinese Defense Minister Chi Haotian which it was speculated that more military aids were sent to Cambodia in the same year (Marks, 2000).

China’s maneuver in normalizing relations with Cambodia clearly took a different course from its Western counterpart and it appeared to be a shelter for the current Cambodian government to take refuge while both sides carefully avoided raising the past and the Khmer Rouge. As the 21st century came, Cambodia-China relations have been forged stronger. It can be seen in November 2000 when President and Party Secretary General Jiang Zemin made an official state visit to Cambodia, marked it as the first visit by Chinese head of state since the 1960s (Chanda, 2002). In addition, Cambodia and China signed a “Joint Statement on the Framework of Bilateral Cooperation”, signaling “friendly interactions” between the two countries’ armed forces (Storey, 2012). Chanda (2002) and Cheunboran (2017) argued that a restore in relations would mean for Cambodia that China would play a historic role in warding off influence of Cambodia’s neighbors Vietnam and Thailand, while Cambodia would be a good place for China to project its influence in the region through political support and economic cooperation. Consequently, the relations

between Cambodia and China were remarkably improved and thereby, the relations reached another milestone with an elevation to “Comprehensive Partnership of Cooperation” in 2006 (Kin, 2020). Moreover, the Chinese government has helped Cambodian armed forces throughout the years. Particularly, in 2005, China provided soft loans to the Royal Cambodian Navy (RCN) with the 15 patrol boats and another 9 patrol boats in 2007 which were claimed to protect Cambodia’s maritime resources (Storey, 2012). Also, between 2000 and 2010, it was reported that Chinese arms sales to Cambodia was recorded at US\$64 million (Storey, 2012). Interestingly, while some were concerned that China would strategically use the Cambodian port in Sihanoukville as a “base for projecting maritime power into the Gulf of Thailand and the Straits of Malacca” (Marks, 2000), it was not until later decade that Cambodia kicked off its first joint military exercise with China. Meanwhile, the Cambodia-U.S. joint military exercises instead dated earlier as mentioned previously. However, in 2008, Chinese navy ship Zhenghe made a 9-day goodwill visit to Cambodia’s Sihanoukville Port, marking as the first entry of Chinese military ship and hence, it was indeed quite alarming for the Western counterpart. In 2009, the international community was also concerned with the Cambodian government as they sent 20 ethnic Uighur back to China through a special plane sent by the Chinese government (Human Rights House, 2010). It was seen as China’s increasing influence as Cambodia conformed to the Chinese government’s pressure despite the concern on human rights violation towards the ethnic Uighur.

On the other hand, it should be noted that throughout these years, diplomatic gestures between Cambodia and China remains the same as that of during Cold War. The Chinese government often shares high level exchanges of state visits, phone call, and congratulatory messages with the Cambodian government, which the intensity is far different from the Western counterpart. Moreover, China remains a destination for Cambodian Royal family to stay for vacation and health check-up, which may show that the Chinese government is trying to be friendly with all factions including old and new friends³³ in Cambodia. Later in the next decade, Cambodia's relations with its neighbors have grown more tense while Cambodia's relations with the U.S. have presented friction. This may present a strategic implication for Sino-Cambodia relations as Cambodia may rely on its Chinese friend to ward off security threats.

Building China-Cambodia Community of Shared Future:

2010 – 2021

Over the years, it becomes obvious that Cambodia and China have been closer while the Cambodia-U.S. relations are going downward. In late 2010, Cambodia and China reiterated an improvement of their relations by upgrading their bilateral ties to “Comprehensive Strategic Partnership of Cooperation” when Prime Minister Hun Sen made an official visit to China (Xinhua, 2010). The Cambodian

³³ Old friend refers to King Sihanouk and the Royal family who has been close to the Chinese government since the 1950s, whereas new friend refers the current Prime Minister Hun Sen who used to be China's foe.

and Chinese governments have shared a remarkable reciprocal relationship. The most notorious moment of Sino-Cambodia relations was portrayed in Cambodia's chairmanship in 2012 ASEAN Summit. It was reported that ASEAN foreign ministers failed to issue a joint communique on the South China Sea Dispute which happened to be the first time in 45 years. Many have pointed out that Cambodia did China's bidding as Cambodia insisted that the Philippines' Scarborough Shoal case and Vietnam's Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) were bilateral issues, and thereby, it could not be reflected in the joint statement (Bower, 2012). This incident tremendously diminished Cambodia's relations with its fellow ASEAN members and tarnished its reputation as a spoiler or China's puppet. In turn, the Chinese government has been rewarding Cambodia with financial assistance and support towards the current ruling party. Likewise, after the ASEAN meeting incident, China committed to provide soft loans and grants to Cambodia with the amount of more than US\$500 million and praised on Cambodia's chairman role in bridging good relations between China and ASEAN (Reuters, 2012). Similarly, during the ASEAN-China foreign ministers' meeting in June 2016, Cambodia was seen to firmly object any strongly worded statements on the South China Sea dispute where others saw it as a pressure from China and thus, it further undermined ASEAN unity. Despite constant denial that Cambodia was bought off by China, Hutt (2016b) categorized Cambodia as "Beijing's most faithful client state", and just a few days after the meeting, it was reported that China shared another commitment to assist Cambodia with US\$600 million in aids and loans.

In addition, the Chinese government have often raised the non-interference policy to criticize the West's pressure and their meddling into Cambodia's domestic politics. Likewise, when the Western community criticized Cambodia on the national election in 2013, China in contrast endorsed the ruling party CPP over the election victory. During the visit of Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi to Cambodia after the 2013 national election, he also reiterated China's support towards Cambodia to "prevent foreign disturbance" in its internal affairs (Radio Free Asia, 2013). Again in 2017, when the Supreme Court dissolved the opposition party CNRP, the U.S. withdrew its financial assistance to National Election Committee (NEC) in Cambodia and widely denounced the upcoming 2018 national election without the ruling party's opponent as illegitimate. Conversely, China backed the Cambodian government by giving US\$20 million to the NEC for polling booths and other equipment (Chandran, 2018). On the other hand, the Cambodian government has been repeatedly upholding its One-China policy. The Cambodian government does not recognize Taiwan as a state, and since 1997, it has shut down the Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office. Oftentimes, the Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen also reiterated Cambodia's loyalty through speeches as he once mentioned in 2019 that "Taiwan is only a province of China, we allow Taiwanese companies to do business in Cambodia, but no Taiwanese flag will ever be flown here" (Ben, 2019). As a result, the Cambodian government has kept denying Taiwan's request to re-establish its representative office in the country, albeit the complaint from Taiwanese companies over time-consuming and complicated

documents process (Taiwan News, 2019). Hence, there is no doubt that Cambodia rather risks its economic benefit from Taiwanese investment, mainly in garment sector, than upsetting its big friend. Adding to that, Cambodia reacted similarly to the Hong Kong protests over extradition bill with mainland China. In 2019, Cambodia was seen to be the first country in Southeast Asia to openly support the Chinese government to put down the protests and cited the issue as China's domestic affairs which should not be interfered by others (Sok, 2019).

In the past years, Sino-Cambodia relations grow even stronger than ever. As the relations have been elevated to “Comprehensive Strategic Partnership of Cooperation”, both counterparts established Inter-Governmental Coordination Committee and annually co-chaired meetings since 2014. Noticeably, the committee is a cooperative mechanism for both states to discuss and work on specific measures to strengthen relations in various fields by closely engaging both sides' state departments (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2014). Moreover, the Cambodian and Chinese governments signed “Action Plan 2019-2023 on Building China-Cambodia Community of Shared Future” during Prime Minister Hun Sen's visit to China in April 2019 (Fresh News, 2019b). It is noted that the action plan was to promote confidence-building between the two states beyond different political systems and ideologies. Another proof of their good relations is during the start of COVID-19 outbreak in early 2020. Despite uncertainty over the risk and fatality of the virus, Cambodia made sure that it would be the first to stand firm with its China friend in need. As such, Prime Minister Hun Sen made a diplomatic gamble by risking

himself to visit China³⁴ personally while it was in an emergency state in February 2020, and he also mentioned that he wanted to show “the sincere feelings of sharing weal and woe between the two peoples at a critical moment” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020). Adding on that, while others banned flights and evacuated their citizens from China, the Cambodian government decided to keep its citizens and diplomats stationed there instead. Although this action was criticized by others, it further proved Cambodia’s closer ties with China. As a result, Cambodia was one of the first countries to receive COVID-19 vaccines from China and recorded its success in vaccination campaign while others were too slow to provide Cambodia with vaccines on time. As of November 2021, it was reported that China had donated and sold around 35 million two-dose vaccines³⁵ to Cambodia (Hutt, 2021).

On the other hand, Sino-Cambodia security engagement have also shared outstanding progress in the last decade. When the Cambodian government decided to expulse 20 Uighur asylum seekers back to China, the U.S. government punished the Cambodian government by suspending military aids program and halting shipment of 200 military trucks in April 2010. In turn, this gave China an opportunity to reward its friend and pulled Cambodia closer. During that period, Cambodia was also having a border dispute with Thailand and in need of military resources. As a result, the Chinese government provided Cambodia with 257 military trucks and

³⁴ Initially, Prime Minister Hun Sen also planned to visit Wuhan, the epicenter of the corona virus outbreak, but it was friendly denied by the Chinese government.

³⁵ For the latest update, see Bridge. (2022). *China COVID-19 Vaccine Tracker*. Retrieved from https://bridgebeijing.com/our-publications/our-publications-1/china-covid-19-vaccines-tracker/#China8217s_Vaccines_Around_the_World

50,000 military uniforms in less than a month (World Uyghur Congress, 2010). In addition, while the U.S. Congress introduced the Cambodian Trade Act of 2010 to prohibit the U.S. government from forgiving debts owed by Cambodia since the Lon Nol's era, China immediately announced that it forgave Cambodia's debt accumulated in the same period (Chun, 2010). Also, China has been assisting Cambodia in building military capability. In 2011, Cambodia was granted with US\$195 million in loan to purchase 12 Zhi-9 helicopters and provide training for 25 pilots and mechanics (Thayer, 2013). Then in May 2012, both countries signed an agreement pledging China's commitment to provide US\$17 million military aid and build a military training facility in Cambodia as well as offering to train Cambodian personnel in China (Radio Free Asia, 2012b). Adding to that, China also gave Cambodia loans for military equipment and training programs later in December. In 2015, the Chinese government donated heavy weaponry to the Cambodian military such as 44 vehicles including jeeps and mounted trucks with rocket launcher, anti-aircraft guns, and other spare parts (Aun, 2015). Moreover, just a month before the 2018 national election, China pledged another military aid worth more than US\$100 million (Reuters, 2018) while the western countries criticized on democracy backwardness and put constant pressure on the Cambodian government. At the same time, Cambodia has been a customer of Chinese arm sales. By July 2019, Prime Minister Hun Sen openly announced that Cambodia spent US\$40 million for Chinese-made weapons purchase in that year (Niem, 2019).

Another remarkable achievement of defense relations is the Sino-Cambodia joint military exercise. Starting from February 2016, Cambodia and China welcomed its first naval training exercise amid concerns over the rising assertiveness of Chinese military in the South China Sea. It should be noted that this marked as the first time that three Chinese warships docked at Cambodian coast along with the joint exercise over emergency and rescue operations (Parameswaran, 2016a). Moreover, the defense ties were boosted through the first major military exercise “Golden Dragon” with over 500 soldiers joining the drill and focused on humanitarian rescue efforts and disaster reliefs (Parameswaran, 2016b). Indeed, this has alarmed South China Sea claimant states and the U.S. over the fear of Chinese military’s maritime power projection in the region. Noticeably, a few weeks after the joint exercise with China, Cambodian government suspended the annual joint military drill Angkor Sentinel with the U.S. which happened since 2010. To make matters worse, the WSJ revealed in 2019 that Cambodian government had allegedly signed a secret deal to host Chinese naval outpost and give military access to Cambodia’s Ream Naval Base (Page et al., 2019) which Cambodia and China keep repeatedly denying the accusation. Interestingly, two years later, Cambodia also suspended the joint exercise Golden Dragon with China in 2021. Strangio (2021b) pointed out that this cancellation may be a signal to new Biden administration that Cambodia is ready to normalize relations with the U.S. since the excuse is found to resemble the one Cambodia offered to the U.S. back in 2017.

Besides that, there are frequent high-level exchanges of between governments and military personnel from PLA and RCAF. For example, Deputy Chief of General Staff of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Lieutenant General Qi Jianguo made a visit to Cambodia in January 2013 and in turn, Cambodian Defense Minister Tea Banh made study tours to China in April and November in the same year (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d.). Additionally, top leaders have often made official visits to each other countries annually even despites the pandemic. At the same time, the Chinese government have never ignored its relations with the Cambodian royal family. As a matter of fact, the Cambodian King Sihamoni and the Queen Mother visit China at least twice a year for medical check-up and vacation (Aun, 2020). During each royal visit, China has shown great hospitality and Chinese top leaders including Xi Jinping himself often presents their courtesy towards the royal family.

b. Economic Relations and Development Assistance

On top of good diplomatic relations, Cambodia and China have shared great economic interactions. After building trust since 1991, now Cambodia is China's "most reliable partner in Southeast Asia" (Heijmans, 2019). Likewise, in recent years, there is a great influx of Chinese business as well as foreign assistance in the Kingdom. However, China' increasing economic presence in Cambodia has been worrisome as it has been pointed out that this engagement will reduce the U.S.

influence in Cambodia and help the Cambodian government resist from the Western aid donors (Lum, 2020).

Bilateral Trade and Foreign Direct Investment

In the early stage of resuming relations, Cambodia's bilateral trade with China was small in volume in comparison with the U.S. counterpart. At the same time, Cambodia has been having trade deficit with China. Likewise, in 2003, Cambodia exported only US\$7 million worth of goods to China while it imported US\$224 million worth of goods back from its counterpart (see Table 4.6). However, as trade relations have progressed and trade volume has also increased, there is still a great disparity with trade balance between Cambodia and China. Interestingly, China is the top largest import partner of Cambodia, which contrasts with the U.S. as the top largest export partner of Cambodia. Noticeably, since 2010, bilateral trade started to grow and by 2020, Cambodia's export products to China were worth more than US\$1 billion, while the import products from China were almost 6 folds higher in balance and spelled into a trade deficit³⁶ for the Cambodian counterpart. The export products are mainly consisted of textiles, wood, and plastic and rubber. On the other hand, main import goods from China are also consisted of textiles³⁷ along with machinery and electrical equipment (Salidjanova & Koch-Weser, 2015). On another important note, when EU decided to waive 20% of preferential treatment

³⁶ Similarly, most ASEAN countries tend to have trade deficit with China.

³⁷ It is worth noted that in 2013, 56% of Cambodia's total import from China was textiles which by surprise, it should be a product that Cambodia has comparative advantages.

under EBA scheme from Cambodia in 2020, the Chinese government stepped in and establish Free Trade Agreement with Cambodia, marking China as the first country to have bilateral FTA with the Kingdom. This Cambodia-China FTA came into effect in January 2022.

Table 4.6: Cambodia’s Goods Trade with China (US\$ millions)

	2003	2006	2009	2012	2015	2018	2020
Export	7	13	16	178	432	859	1092
Import	224	516	881	2228	3955	6140	7057
Balance	-218	-502	-865	-2050	-3523	-5281	-5965

Source: ASEANstats

In term of FDI, China has been one of the top investors in Cambodia. Although, Cambodia has been known for its weak institutions and high production cost for Western investors, it does not stop the Chinese firms from coming into the country. To boost investment, both governments signed Agreement for the Promotion and Protection of Investment in 1996 and came into force by 1999. According to O’Neill (2014), from 1994 to 2013, China emerged to be the largest investor in Cambodia with the accumulative amount of US\$ 9.1 billion. Also, by 2014, the accumulative amount of Chinese FDI stocks in Cambodia reached at US\$6 billion (see Table 4.7). Noticeably, it has been pointed out that the Chinese

investments are mainly driven by deep political trust, investment opportunities such as economic condition and low labor costs, and natural resources (Chheang, 2017; O’Neill, 2020). Moreover, both governments have enjoyed a reciprocal relationship. As it is known that the Chinese firms secures investment through its political ties with the Cambodian ruling party CPP and the elites, the Cambodian government depends on its engagement with China through trade and investment for legitimacy inside home (Luo & Un, 2021). However, the Chinese investment also gives have negative socio-economic repercussions on the environment and local communities (Chheang, 2017).

Table 4.7: China’s FDI Stocks in Cambodia (US\$ millions)

2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
6040	6656	7260	7894	8618	9731	10839

Source: ASEANstats

Development Assistance

The Chinese financial assistance has been provided to Cambodia since early 1990s. In 1992, it was reported that at least US\$250 million was provided to Cambodia throughout its effort in rebuilding the country including reconstructing an agricultural college and pharmaceutical factory, building wells, and providing

medical training (Richardson, 2005). Also, the Chinese government has been opportunistic in providing aids to Cambodia when the Western counterpart turns in opposite direction and suspends its assistance. Therefore, the Chinese assistance has become a refuge for Cambodia. After the internal disruption in 1997, the U.S. suspended direct government-to-government aids to Cambodia, but in contrast, China provided Cambodia with an assistance worth of US\$20 million from August to December that year (Richardson, 2005). Although it is always claimed that the Chinese aids come with no string attached, there is pattern to be noticed as Cambodia has been seen to be under the Chinese influence. In 1997, Hun Sen government accommodated China by shutting down the Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office in the country. As a result, in the following year after the result of 1998 national election, the Chinese government granted loan for agriculture and infrastructure under the amount of US\$200 million with interest-free and another foreign assistance worth US\$18 million (Richardson, 2005). Another example was when Cambodia deported 20 Uighur asylum seekers back to China in December 2009, and two days later, the Chinese government pledged US\$1.2 billion with 14 development agreements (Sun & Keo, 2010). In addition, when Cambodia held ASEAN chairmanship in 2012 and stood firmly against the Philippines and Vietnam's statement inclusion regarding the South China Sea dispute, Cambodia received another pledge of more than US\$500 million in soft loans and grant from China, citing "helping Beijing maintain good relations with the regional grouping

ASEAN” (Reuters, 2012). In that year alone, the Chinese ODA-like provided to Cambodia reached US\$693 million (see Table 4.8).

Table 4.8: China’s ODA-like³⁸ Flow into Cambodia (US\$ millions)

2000	2003	2006	2009	2012	2015	2017
107	64	79	669	693	697	1548

Source: AidData (Version 2.0)

On the other hand, China employed different approach from the Western counterpart in handling Cambodia’s old-era debts. Likewise, during the visit of Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji to Cambodia for the ASEAN Summit in 2002, he announced that the Chinese government would reduce or cancel debts through China’s Asia Debt Reduction Plan to Cambodia with an estimation from US\$60 to US\$1 billion (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2002). Again in 2010, as the U.S. kept pressing towards Cambodia’s debt during the Lon Nol era, China instead canceled the debt and transferred into development projects through an agreement signed by Prime Minister Hun Sen and the National People’s Congress Chairman Wu Bangguo

³⁸ ODA-like is one of the categories of China’s financial assistance to foreign countries. It is based on OECD-DAC guidelines for Official Development Assistance (ODA) under three main criteria. Therefore, the figure shown in Table 9 does not represent the total amount of China’s financial assistance to Cambodia. For more detail on the criteria, see Custer, S., Dreher, A., Elston, T.B., Fuchs, A., Ghose, S., Lin, J., Malik, A., Parks, B.C., Russell, B., Solomon, K., Strange, A., Tierney, M.J., Walsh, K., Zaleski, L., & Zhang, S. (2021). *Tracking Chinese Development Finance: An Application of AidData’s TUFF 2.0 Methodology*. Williamsburg, VA: AidData at William & Mary.

(Chun, 2010). Moreover, Cambodia has been a supportive recipient under the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) since 2013. Mainly, this financial assistance helps Cambodia in infrastructure developments such as road constructions and irrigation systems to improve regional connectivity and competitiveness. By 2017, it was reported that China has supported Cambodia in building more than 2000 kilometers of road, seven large bridges and a new container terminal at the Phnom Penh Autonomous Port (Heng, 2018). In that year, the Chinese ODA reached US\$1.5 billion, nearly 15-fold in comparison to ODA in 2000 with only US\$107 million. Currently, there are main on-going development projects under BRI such as 190-kilometer expressway connecting the capital city Phnom Penh to Preah Sihanouk province, and constructions of new Siem Reap international airport and Phnom Penh international airport (Chheang, 2021).

4.3. Cambodia's Relationship Dynamics with the Great Powers

Through observation, it is found that Cambodia's relations with both the U.S. and China first started off in a good term. However, there is a distinction in the two relations later. As Cambodia-U.S. relations deteriorate through time, Cambodia-China relations instead show a good progress. Interestingly, there is a striking similarity in the past and current relations.

Table 4.9 shows Cambodia-U.S. relationship dynamics in two different periods. In political and military relations, Cambodia and the U.S. have shared positive interactions in the early phase. Likewise, it could be seen that after establishing diplomatic relations, the U.S. was a main military supporter of Cambodia and later it was also expanded to socio-economic field as a part of the U.S.'s commitment in containing communist spread in the region. For instance, since both had signed a "mutual defense assistance agreement" in December 1950 (Clymer, 2004a), the U.S. had been active in providing Cambodia with financial assistance, military supplies, and personnel trainings. However, the relations began to decline after Cambodia approached China later in 1956 and were officially broken in 1965. Comparably, although there saw a positive light in the rapprochement of relations between Cambodia and the U.S. since 1991, the latter half of 2010s have been filled with diplomatic frictions and mistrust. Particularly, military and defense cooperation between the two countries were moving upward when the U.S. shifted its attention to rebalance to Asia. The U.S. had been helping Cambodia modernize its military capability through financial assistance, joint exercises, and trainings. The annual large-scale multinational peacekeeping exercise Angkor Sentinel from 2010 until 2016 is a good example of Cambodia-U.S. military cooperation. Unfortunately, the current relations have been mainly constraint by situations on Cambodia's domestic politics, mutual mistrust, and its close relations with China.

Table 4.9: Cambodia-U.S. Relationship Dynamics

Period	Diplomatic History	Relations since 1991
Early phase	<p>Good</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - U.S.: contained communist spread - Cambodia: security protection 	<p>Good</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - U.S.: Rebalance to Asia - Cambodia: development and security cooperation
Later	<p>Mutual Mistrust</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - U.S.: questioned on Cambodia's neutrality - Cambodia: suspected U.S. to back Thailand and South Vietnam's territorial incursion 	<p>Mutual Mistrust</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - U.S.: suspected Cambodia to host Chinese military base - Cambodia: accused CIA to conspire "color revolution" against Cambodian government

Source: Author

On the other hand, Table 4.10 indicates Cambodia-China relationship dynamics in different direction of that with the U.S. Cambodia and China relations have been established steadily and improved over the years. Clearly, what was true in the past carries on into the present relations. Although Cambodia first had had a negative perception towards China, its impression changed after China supported Cambodia's non-alignment policy and urged the withdrawal of Viet Minh troops from the country. Since then, Cambodia officially recognized China in 1958 and there was a good progress in relations as the Chinese assistance to Cambodia grew larger while Cambodia-U.S. relations started to fall. Also, what made Cambodia-China relations different was that China had always been a great supporter of Cambodia's territorial sovereignty and its neutrality in the Cold War which aligned

with the Chinese interest. Moreover, later, both Cambodia and China shared the same threat perception towards Vietnam. Similarly, the contemporary relations started off from rebuilding trust between the two counterparts. In the early rapprochement, military relations with China were yet limited in comparison to that of the U.S. However, the relations began to elevate significantly in the last decade. As such, both achieved “Comprehensive Strategic Partnership of Cooperation” in 2010 and have had an ironclad friendship since then. In addition, China’s diplomatic interactions with Cambodia are very active as there are frequent exchanges of not only top leaders, but also between high-ranking military personnel, indicating good ties in both political and defense cooperation.

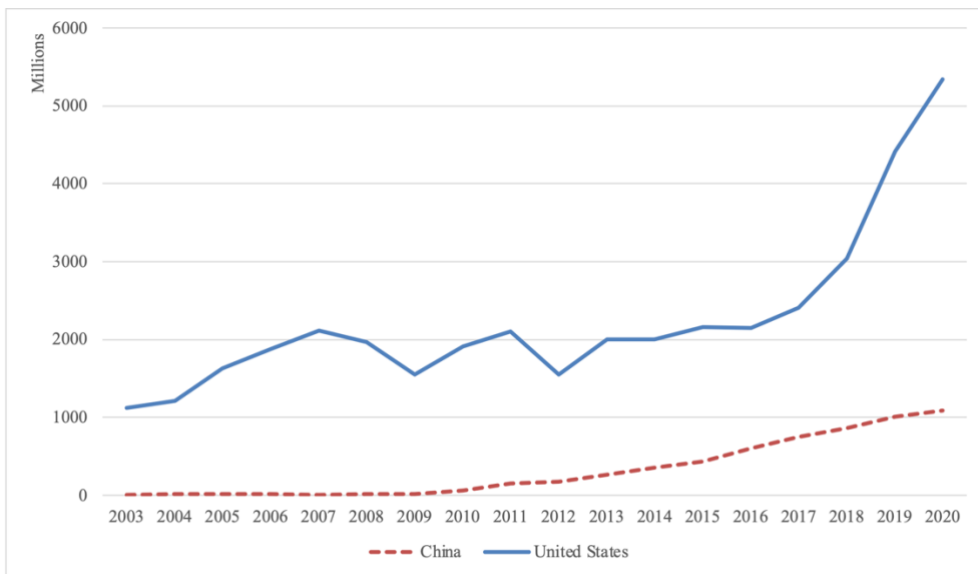
Table 4.10: Cambodia-China Relationship Dynamics

Period	Diplomatic History	Relations since 1991
Early phase	<p>Good</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - China: kept Cambodia neutral - Cambodia: security support and balance between the two blocs 	<p>Good</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - China: re-building trust with Cambodia - Cambodia: development cooperation
Later	<p>Reciprocal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - China: minimized Vietnamese influence in the region - Cambodia: Chinese support to back communist Khmer Rouge regime and against Vietnam’s influence 	<p>Ironclad Friendship</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - China: power projection in Southeast Asia - Cambodia: development and security cooperation

Source: Author

Another intriguing point lies in the economic interactions between Cambodia and the superpowers. Cambodia appears to be adopting economic pragmatism with both the U.S. and China. Despite diplomatic tension and uncertainty, bilateral economic relations between Cambodia and U.S. have significantly grown. Noticeably, Cambodia has been having consecutive trade surplus with the U.S. which was over US\$1 billion in 2003 and grew fivefold to over US\$5 billion in 2020 (see Figure 4.1).

Figure 4.1: Cambodia’s Export in Goods to the U.S. and China (US\$ millions)

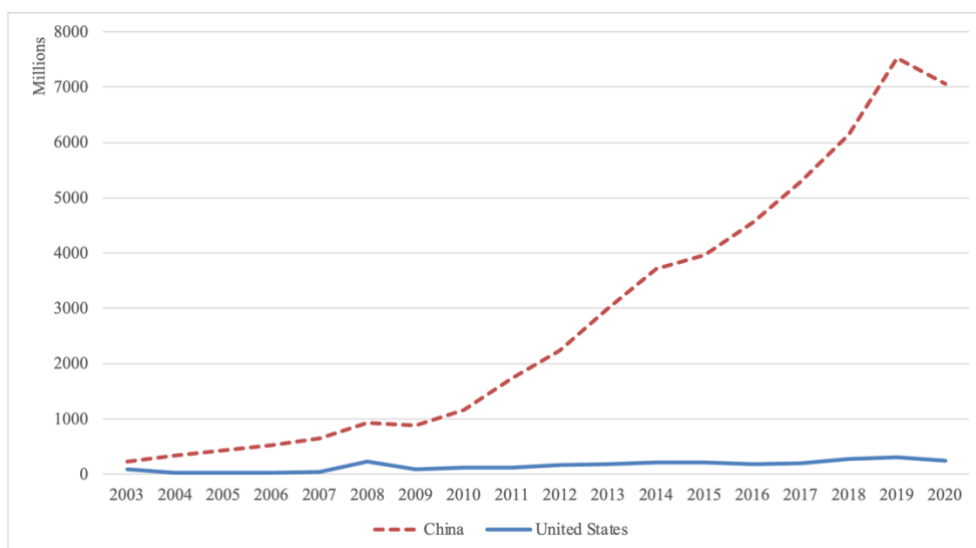


Source: ASEANstats

Conversely, Cambodia has been having trade imbalance with China as economic relations are progressing. As such, the trade deficit grew from US\$218 million in 2003 to almost US\$6 billion in 2020 (see Figure 4.2). Besides, the two-

way trade of Cambodia and the U.S. has shown remarkable amount since the early rapprochement which is in opposite of the Chinese counterpart whose total trade with Cambodia just started to pick up in the last decade.

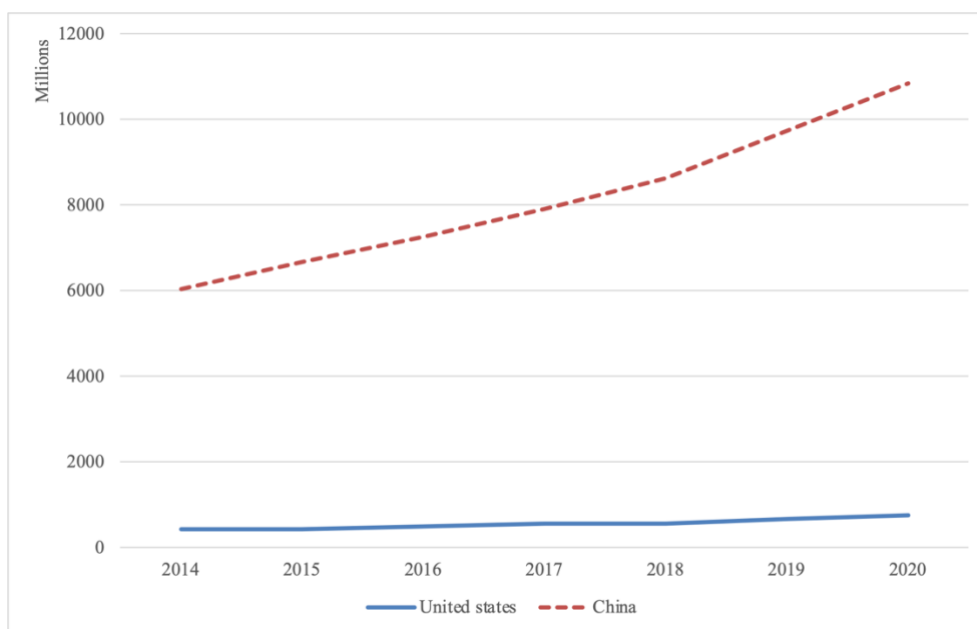
Figure 4.2: Cambodia's Import in Goods from the U.S. and China (US\$ millions)



Source: ASEANstats

On the other hand, when comparing FDI flow into Cambodia, the Chinese FDI stock has made up greater amount than that of the U.S. albeit the two great powers are both top investors in the country (see Figure 4.3). This proves a spillover from close political tie with China as FDI flow has been constantly rising over the last decade comparing to the U.S.

Figure 4.3: The U.S. and China's FDI Stocks in Cambodia (US\$ millions)



Source: ASEANstats

In addition, in the early 2000s, the U.S. and China's ODA flow into Cambodia shared similar amount, but it started to diverge as Cambodia's relations with China has grown closer. Likewise, the Chinese ODA to Cambodia accounted for US\$669 million in 2009 which was eightfold higher than the U.S. ODA with the total amount of only US\$81.2 million in the same year. Also, the latest data shows that in 2017, the Chinese ODA flow to Cambodia grew dramatically to US\$1.5 billion (see Table 4.8) while ODA from the U.S. counterpart has not shown much progress since early 2000s (see Table 4.4). In addition, there is a difference in ODA policies towards Cambodia. While the U.S. financial aid is strict with conditionality

on Cambodia's domestic situations such as democracy, human rights, and the rule of law and is mainly channeled through NGOs, the Chinese aid instead focus on infrastructure developments and is directly given to the Cambodian government.

Impressively, China appears to have sustained relations with Cambodia through the test of time, despite the fact that it was a supporter of the genocide regime, Khmer Rouge, in the past. Meanwhile, relations with the U.S. take a different stance. Even though both parties have tried to mend their relations, the past has been relived and filled with mistrust. Particularly, Cambodia-U.S. relations deteriorated due to mutual suspicion when the U.S. doubted Cambodia's neutral stance as it approached China. In the present day, the relations again started to decline when Cambodia moved closer to China. Yet, Cambodia-U.S. economic relations should not be overlooked as they have been persistent albeit their political rows. In meantime, although Cambodia-China economic relations have been intensified, Cambodia has been under huge disadvantages over the two-way trade with China. Thereby, it begs the question of why Cambodia's relations with the U.S. and China go in different directions and what reasons push Cambodia closer to China although it shares good relations with the U.S. in the early stage. Therefore, the following chapter will solve this puzzle by taking the geopolitics of Cambodia into consideration.

Chapter 5. From Local to Grand Geopolitics

The finding above has presented Cambodia's position in the geopolitical struggles since its Independence. As one is confined by its own geographical location, Cambodia has always been maneuvering its course of survival to dodge from more powerful neighbors throughout the history. Likewise, the finding has shown that Cambodia's foreign policy towards the U.S. and China (grand geopolitics) has been attached to its relations with Thailand and Vietnam (local geopolitics). Therefore, this chapter will apply dual geopolitical analysis to understand how Cambodia's local geopolitics with its neighbors has shaped its foreign policy towards the U.S. and China at grand level. The first section will discuss Cambodia's approach in indirect balancing against its neighbors, whereas the second section will deal with Cambodia's strategic importance towards the great powers.

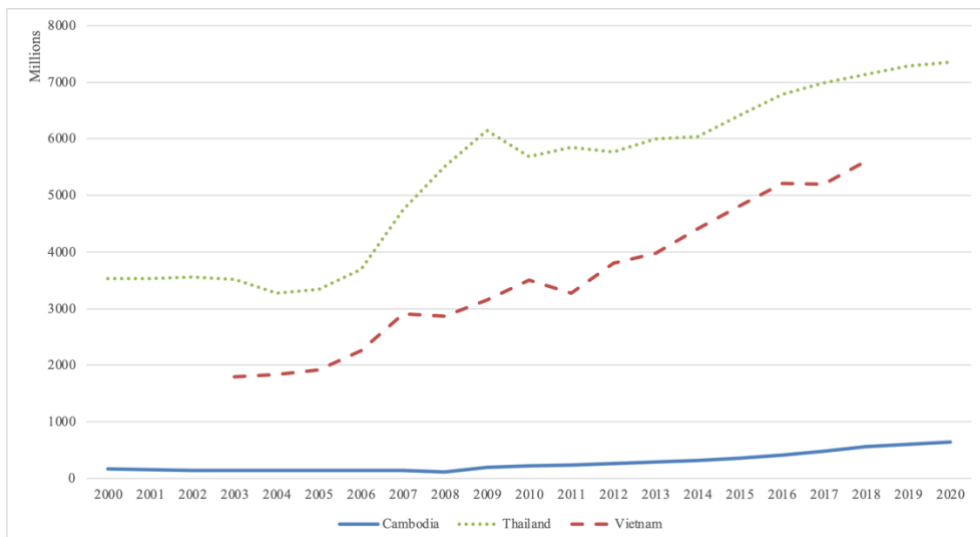
5.1. Superpowers as Indirect Balancing Mechanism

Since Ancient time, Cambodia has been under constant threats by its powerful neighbors. After the fall of the Khmer Empire³⁹ in the 15th century, Cambodia has been under the influence of its stronger neighbors, Siam (Thailand) and Dai Viet (Vietnam). Similarly, after the Independence in 1953, the two neighbors have continued to put Cambodia under pressure as it is sandwiched in between

³⁹ Cambodia was the Khmer Empire from 9th to 15th century. Also known as the greatest era of ancient time.

(Thailand to the west, Vietnam to the south). It is quite alarming since Cambodia has an unmatched power capability with Thailand and Vietnam. Until today, Cambodia's military capability remains relatively weak in comparison to its two neighbors (see Figure 5.1). In case of a conflict outbreak, it is obvious that Cambodia will have more disadvantages and it needs to make a political calculation carefully to navigate through this troubled geostrategic location. Hence, Cambodia adopts indirect balancing strategy by extending its hand and diversifying its relations with other powers, mainly the superpowers, to countervail against the Thai and Vietnamese influence. Inevitably, this maneuver has bound Cambodia to behave in particular ways with the superpowers.

Figure 5.1: Cambodia's Military Expenditure Compared to Thailand and Vietnam (US\$ millions)



Source: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI)

Therefore, Table 5.1. summarizes strategic events and continuity in Cambodia's security threats and shows examples of how the superpowers have responded, which in turn, acting as a countervailing force against the neighbors. The first instance, as presented in Chapter 3, was Cambodia's experiences with Thailand and Vietnam in the 1950s and 1960s being tied by its territorial insecurity. In August 1954, Thailand occupied the Preah Vihear temple and Deth (2017) implied that this action might have been driven by the fact that Cambodia was not under the French protection which gave Thailand an opportunity to reclaim the territory. Although the case was brought to ICJ and successfully ruled that Cambodia owned the temple, border skirmishes remained happening occasionally at the border after 1962. On the other side, Cambodia's territorial integrity was also threatened by the Vietnamese encroachment in two main events. First was during the battle between the French and the Viet Minh extended into Cambodian territory in the early 1950s and second was when the Vietnam War was intensified in the 1960s. As Cambodia was relatively weak in military capacity, it could not deal with two strong forces presenting at the same time. Therefore, Cambodia must seek foreign powers to counter the pressure from Thailand and Vietnam. As a result, even before 1953, Cambodia had relied on the U.S. for financial and military assistance. After establishing diplomatic relations, Cambodia asked the U.S. for supplies to support its army battalion and signed a mutual defense assistance agreement in 1950 (Clymer, 2004). Then, by December 1953, Szaz (1955) mentioned that Sihanouk built up the Royal army and operated offensive strike towards the Viet Minh albeit with limited

success. Moreover, Cambodia signed an agreement with the U.S. to establish Military Assistance and Advisory Group (MAAG) in 1955 and thus, allowing more flow of military assistance to strengthen Cambodian armed forces. Unfortunately, the U.S. support towards Cambodia remained constraint. Hence, the U.S. did not think more of a neutral Cambodia and chose to stay silent over the territorial encroachment of Thailand and South Vietnam at that time (Lasater, 1969).

Table 5.1: Cambodia’s Strategic Events and the Great Powers’ Responses⁴⁰

Period	Strategic Events	U.S.'s Response	China's Response
1950s 1960s	Border incursion from Thailand and South Vietnam	- Limited support - Ignored border incursion issues	- Supported Cambodia’s neutrality and territorial integrity against foreign aggression
2008 -	Border disputes and tension with Thailand and Vietnam	- 2010: suspended military aid program and 200 military trucks to Cambodia - 2010: prohibited from forgiving debts owed during Lon Nol era - 2021: imposed arms embargo on Cambodia	- 2010: provided 257 military trucks and 50,000 military uniforms - 2010: forgave Cambodia’s debts during Lon Nol era - 2011: loaned Cambodia to buy 12 Zhi-9 helicopters and provided training for 25 pilots and mechanics - 2015: reiterated mutual support on “issues of sovereignty, security, and development” the same month of Cambodia-Vietnam Joint Border Commission meeting

Source: Author

⁴⁰ The table shown here is just an example of how the great powers have responded to security threats Cambodia has been facing. It does not reflect all interactions between Cambodia and the great powers which can be found in chapter 4.

As a result, Cambodia must seek an alternative support which then China came into picture. Upon the official visit of King Sihanouk to China in 1956, Cambodia received US\$22.4 million as an assistance despite having not established official relations yet (Lasater, 1969). In addition, China had been verbally supporting Cambodia's neutrality and sharing rhetoric on Thailand and South Vietnam's territorial incursion into Cambodia. Adding to that, when Cambodia pressed for international conference to ensure Cambodia's neutrality, China strongly supported its decision against "foreign aggression" (Richardson, 2005). Then, as relations with the U.S. deteriorated, China became a backup for assistance and protection.

The second case presents a continuity in Cambodia's strategic interests vis-à-vis its neighbors. Since state's geographical characteristics are "unchanging and unchangeable" (Spykman, 1938), border conflict and tension may be prolonged. Therefore, Cambodia's security has been threatened by the same issues in recent decades, Cambodia-Thailand Preah Vihear Temple dispute and Cambodia-Vietnam border tension. The first case could be seen when Cambodia sought to enlist Preah Vihear Temple as a UNESCO World Heritage Site and a conflict broke out between Cambodia and Thailand from 2008 until late 2011. Although none of the superpowers had taken side over this border dispute, there was a noticeable event indirectly linked to this case. In April 2010, the U.S. suspended military aids program and halted shipment of 200 military trucks and trailers to Cambodia. In contrast, China provided Cambodia with 257 military trucks and 50,000 military uniforms in less than a month. In addition, Cambodia was granted loan of US\$195 million to

purchase 12 Zhi-9 helicopters in 2011. It was a right timing since Cambodia needed military supplies as border dispute with Thailand was intensified.

In addition, Cambodia-Vietnam border tension is less obvious, but it presents challenge to Cambodia. Both countries have been trying to solve the border issues, even though tension normally arises when the Cambodian opposition party pressures the government by constantly citing that it is under influence of Vietnam and favors its counterpart in border negotiation. Likewise, tension arose in 2015 when a group led by CNRP activists visited the disputed area and clashed with local Vietnamese villagers. As a result, Cambodia-Vietnam Joint Border Commission worked swiftly to hold a meeting on the issue. Noticeably, Cambodia was seeking to indirect balance Vietnam amid the border tension flared. As such, Cambodian Defense Minister Tea Banh visited Beijing and met with Vice Chairman of the Central Military Commission Xu Qiliang in July 2015⁴¹ which was in the same month of Cambodia-Vietnam Joint Border Commission meeting. Likewise, it was seen that both reiterated mutual support on “issues of sovereignty, security, and development” (Cheunboran, 2015). Thus, Leng (2017) pointed out that this allowed Cambodia to gain bargaining power over border negotiation vis-à-vis Vietnam.

In sum, the local geopolitics impose security challenges which persist throughout history. Thus, Cambodia must rely on a third power to indirect balance against the neighbors’ pressure which clearly it affects how or whom Cambodia

⁴¹ It is in the same month of Cambodia-Vietnam Joint Border Commission meeting.

seeks to establish military alignment and support from. As having shown earlier, Cambodia first has good relations with the U.S. and rely on its military assistance. However, when security issues emerge or intensify, the U.S. support remains limited which creates an opportunity for China to fill itself in. On the other hand, one may ask why the U.S. has been less enthusiastic in assisting Cambodia, while instead China seems to be a preferable option. Also, it should be noted that until today, Cambodia has been constantly voicing its neutrality even though it seems to be far from reality. Thus, the next section will take on this issue and discuss strategic importance Cambodia shares with the superpowers.

5.2. Cambodia's Fragile Neutrality?

In the past, Cambodia had been voicing its stance towards neutrality and non-alignment only to fall deeply into a vicious trap of ideological struggles, mainly the proxy Vietnam War. Eventually, it turned Cambodia into a tragedy of Khmer Rouge regime killing millions of people. Again, the current geopolitics seems to suggest similar scenario if Cambodia is not careful in its strategic trajectory towards the great powers. Cambodia should adopt what has been clearly written in the 1993 Constitution, “a policy of permanent neutrality and non-alignment”. However, as Cambodia's strategic choice is inevitably constraint by its neighbors, it has been put in a delicate situation to survive while maintaining position towards the superpowers. Yet, Cambodia cannot one-sidedly embrace either the U.S. or China as relationship needs to meet halfway. In other words, Cambodia's relations with the superpowers

depend on reciprocity and shared strategic interests. Hence, good or bad relations are not coincidental, but instead a result of interactions. Therefore, this section will discuss on how Cambodia regards the superpowers and vice versa throughout its historical experiences until today's geopolitics. It is also imperative to understand the reasons why Cambodia seems to be closer to China than the U.S.

5.2.1. Cambodia's Dependence on the Superpowers

What is quite interesting in Cambodia-U.S. relations is that their interactions have been positive at the early stage and yet, it is deteriorating with mutual distrust by times. As being mentioned in the previous chapter, Cambodia established good relations with the U.S. in the early encounter in 1950s. To Cambodia, the U.S. was a crucial means of assistance in the post-Independence while the French was pulling out from the country. As such, Cambodia was relying on the U.S. for social, economic, and military supports. For instance, when Cambodia signed an agreement to establish MAAG in Cambodia, the U.S. had the responsibility to not only provide logistical supports, but also technical trainings to the Cambodian army to be effective fighting forces. In addition, Bulut (2017) pointed out that Cambodia needed the U.S. to provide "international guarantees on the protection of Cambodia's territorial integrity" while the Vietnam War was disrupting by Cambodian border. Comparing to the present day, the U.S. has been critical for Cambodia's rehabilitating effort after 1991. Likewise, since USAID was established in 1992, millions of development assistance flowing into the country. Economically, Cambodia depends on the U.S.

market with preferential treatment. As such, the U.S. has long been the top export partner of Cambodia. Also, the U.S. remains one of the top ODA donors to Cambodia albeit lesser amount than China. Moreover, Cambodia's defense cooperation with the U.S. provides an opportunity to modernize Cambodian military capability, mainly through financial assistance and training exercises.

In contrast, Sino-Cambodia relations seem to sustain and improve throughout history. During the Cold War, Cambodia's approach towards China was viewed by the capitalist bloc as a threat to the communist containment effort. However, there were two logical reasons behind Cambodia's strategic choice. First, Cambodia approached China to balance between the two blocs. Cambodia's relations with the U.S. had casted doubt and dissatisfaction at home on its policy of neutrality, specifically when Cambodia signed military aid agreement with the U.S. in 1955. Therefore, China was a good option for Cambodia to reaffirm its stance, and the Cambodian government also highlighted that it would accept aid "from any quarter, provided that it does not prejudice the sovereignty and the neutrality" of Cambodia (Lasater, 1969). Second, China was a good countervailing power against the threat of its neighbors, considering that the U.S. ignored this issue. China had been supporting Cambodia's neutrality and assured its commitment towards Cambodia's security by calling out Thailand and South Vietnam as "foreign aggression" into the Cambodian territory (Richardson, 2005). In the present day, China remains an important friend to buffer the Vietnamese influence on Cambodia since the country also shares an asymmetrical relationship with Vietnam. Although inexplicitly, China

presents Cambodia an opportunity to slowly break away from Vietnam. Yet, Cambodia is still seen as moving carefully while trying not to upset its Vietnamese counterpart. The best example to explain this case would be during Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen's visit to Vietnam in 2013, a year after Cambodia hosted ASEAN Summit which failed to issue a joint communique on the South China Sea dispute. Despite a decline in popularity and an increase in anti-Vietnamese sentiment that the ruling party was under Vietnam's grip, Hun Sen made a controversial move at home as he visited Hanoi and publicly spoke in Vietnamese language to "create a sense of amity" with his traditional friend Vietnam (Leng, 2014). Besides that, the active flow of Chinese FDI and ODA into Cambodia has had positive impacts on the country's development at certain point, despite the risk of mismanagement and concern of the Chinese debt trap. Also, Cambodia's security cooperation with China presents an alternative option for Cambodia to increase its capability in case the U.S. is unreachable.

As being shown, the degrees of Cambodia's dependence on the great powers are different, despite that both the U.S. and China appear to be important in indirect balancing with its two neighbors through various types of assistance and military cooperation. Thus, as mentioned previously, not only that we should look at how Cambodia views the U.S. and China, but also at why both great powers either moderately or profoundly establish their relations with Cambodia. The next part will discuss on how the great powers perceive Cambodia.

5.2.2. Cambodia and its Strategic Importance

Previously, I discussed Cambodia’s foreign policy with the great powers through the lens of local geopolitics. Then, this part will delve into the great powers’ strategic interests in Cambodia. This will help us understand why Cambodia-China relations are better than with the U.S. which inevitably affects Cambodia’s neutral stance. Therefore, Table 5.2 briefly mentions Cambodia’s strategic importance to the superpowers since Independence.

Table 5.2: Cambodia and its Strategic Importance to the Great Powers

Period	To the U.S.	To China
Past	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cambodia was part of the containment of communist spread in Southeast Asia. - However, it had less strategic importance compared to Thailand (close ally) and South Vietnam (strategic partner). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cambodia was a strategic option to minimize Vietnamese influence in the region. - For example, China launched an invasion attack against Vietnam in 1979 to teach a lesson after it toppled down Khmer Rouge.
Present	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cambodia is part of the rebalance to Asia. - However, it presents less geostrategic significance. For example, Cambodia is not a claimant state of South China Sea. Instead, Vietnam is not only a claimant state, but also shares a threat perception vis-à-vis China. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cambodia is not only an important partner to keep Vietnam in check, but also a place for Chinese power projection in the region. - For example, ASEAN Summit 2012 and 2016 when Cambodia blocked joint statements on the South China Sea dispute.

Source: Author

The U.S. interest in Cambodia during Cold War was tied to the containment of communist spread in Southeast Asia. The U.S. must make sure that Cambodia did not fall into communist hand despite its neutral stance between the two blocs. In this

case, aids and military assistance are necessary to strengthen Cambodia's capacity to protect itself. However, Cambodia's neutrality and non-alignment became a constraint to the U.S. interest in the country. On top of that, Cambodia had less strategic importance compared to its two neighbors. Particularly, Thailand was a close ally and a backbone for the U.S. engagement in the region. On top of that, Thailand was a member of the U.S.-led anti-communist SEATO, whereas South Vietnam was a strategic partner and a hotbed in countering the spread of communism during Cold War. Thus, it is apparent that the U.S. diverted more of its resources and attention to the two neighbors rather than Cambodia.

Similarly, Cambodia also presents less geostrategic significance to the U.S. in the contemporary politics. To be fair, the U.S. did make efforts to reengage Cambodia, particularly during the Bush and Obama administrations⁴². However, mutual distrust remains in place. More significantly, the U.S. does not see Cambodia as a buffer place in its rebalancing strategy to China. For example, Cambodia is not one of the South China Sea's claimant states and shares diverging interest from the U.S. In contrast, Cambodia's neighbor Vietnam is not only a claimant state, but also long time shares a threat perception vis-à-vis China. Thereby, it is without a doubt that the U.S. and Vietnam revitalize their relations as their security interests align, albeit having a bitter past. At the same time, not only in term of geographical distance, but as Ciorciari (2020) mentioned, the U.S. political distance from the mainland

⁴² During the Bush administration, Southeast Asia was a second front to the U.S. effort towards "War on Terror" which spelled into increasing engagement with others including Cambodia. Then, during the Obama administration, "Pivot to Asia" policy was the U.S.'s strategic rebalancing towards Asia.

Southeast Asia presents a strategic drift and an opportunistic gap for China to fill in. Coupling with the U.S.'s lack of enthusiasm, Cambodia may not be a top priority.

Conversely, China has viewed Cambodia as strategically pivotal to its policy despite Cambodia is relatively a small state. The Chinese geopolitical interests have aligned with that of Cambodia, particularly regarding Vietnam. Chanda (2010) pointed out that the Chinese security objective lay in preventing any rising power by its southern border. Thus, Cambodia was a strategic option for China to “limit Vietnam’s exercise of power (containment)” and “reduce its power (rollback)” (McGregor, 1990). Moreover, the Sino-American rapprochement in 1972 had been threatening Sino-Vietnamese relations and turning Vietnam closer to the Soviet Unions (Garver, 1981), which was not a good scenario for China during the Sino-Soviet split. Therefore, Cambodia was important for China to keep Vietnam in check and restrain its expansionist behavior in Indochina. An example could be seen during the Vietnamese invasion into Cambodia in December 1978. In the following year, China taught Vietnam a lesson by launching an invasion into the Vietnamese territory. Also, in the 1980s, China along with other western powers continued to pressure Vietnam to withdraw its troop from Cambodia.

In addition, the current geopolitics suggests a continuity in Chinese strategic interests vis-à-vis the Kingdom. Cambodia is an important partner for China to not only buffer its traditional rival Vietnam, but also exert influence in the region (Burgos & Ear, 2010). Likewise, Florick (2021) suggested that it is “China’s

leverage point on ASEAN". Specifically, Cambodia has been seen as China's proponent regarding the South China Sea dispute which example can be seen during the 2012 and 2016 ASEAN Summit as Cambodia blocked a joint statement on the issue. On top of that, scholars argued that Cambodia's strategic location would provide "an excellent base" for China to exert its maritime influence into the Gulf of Thailand and Straits of Malacca (Marks, 2000; Cheunboran, 2017), although there is a rebuttal claim that such a case is impossible since the depth of water along Cambodia's is too shallow to host any major naval activities (Chen, 2021). On the other hand, China has been promoting its economic initiatives such as BRI to not only bridge connectivity with the world and boost economic development, but also exert its statecraft to challenge the current international order. Thus, a recipient of BRI projects like Cambodia has helped China in realizing its goals through active participation. Moreover, although it is frequently claimed that the Chinese aid comes without string attached, Cambodia's sovereignty has been questioned of under the Chinese influence.

From the discussion above, the Chinese interests in Cambodia have weighed more than the U.S.'s. Hence, Cambodia does not have many options but to embrace its relations with China. At the same time, it does not mean that Cambodia ignores its relations with the U.S., but it should be reciprocal. Nonetheless, the U.S. cannot completely ignore Cambodia lest it falls deeper into the Chinese orbit.

Chapter 6. Conclusion

This research aims to understand Cambodia's foreign policy towards the U.S. and China from 1991 to 2021 by looking into the geopolitics of Cambodia, mainly geographical and historical factors. Throughout the study, it argues that Cambodia's strategic interests are security survival against challenges posed by its two powerful neighbors Thailand and Vietnam (local geopolitics), and in turn, these interests have shaped Cambodia's relations with the superpowers (grand geopolitics). In other words, Cambodia's strategic position is trapped in between its "local" and "grand" geopolitics.

Particularly, Cambodia's geostrategic location has shared a proximity with Thailand and Vietnam which pushes it to constantly indirect balancing their influences. As Cambodia's shared territorial boundaries with its neighbors predated since ancient times, nationalism and historical animosity have loomed large behind their relations. Likewise, territorial issues have been threatening Cambodia's security and sovereignty until today. To the west and northwest, Cambodia is facing challenges from Thailand over the Preah Vihear Temple since the 1950s and again it reemerged in 2008 until 2011. To the east, not only that Cambodia is having boundary issues, but it also shares an asymmetric relationship with Vietnam. However, as a smaller power, it would be counterproductive and impossible for Cambodia to directly balance

against its neighbors. Thereby, Cambodia needs other powers, mainly the superpowers, to offset pressures from Thailand and Vietnam. Against this backdrop, Cambodia have been approaching the U.S. and China. Interestingly, the U.S. has become the first great power that Cambodia established good diplomatic and security relations, but it does not stand through the test of time since suspicion grows between the two counterparts. On the other hand, China could be described as an alternative option for Cambodia at first, but the relations are developed stronger and keep progressing while there is a friction in Cambodia-U.S. relations. Another captivating point is that there is a continuity from the past carrying on to the current relations between Cambodia and the two great powers. Thus, it is necessary to answer the puzzle why Cambodia's relations with the U.S. and China take different directions.

Also, it should be noted that Cambodia has been pursuing a policy of permanent neutrality and non-alignment as it is formulated in the 1993 Constitution. Hence, Cambodia would be seen as violating its own constitution in case there is an imbalance in Cambodia's foreign policy with any powers, especially towards the U.S. and China. Coupling with the local geopolitical threats from Thailand and Vietnam, Cambodia has been walking on thin ice if it makes a strategic miscalculation in maneuvering its survival. However, the reciprocity shared between Cambodia and the superpowers should not be ignored in understanding its foreign policy. Despite having positive relations in the early stage, Cambodia and the U.S.

do not share the same strategic interests. As such, the U.S.'s relations with Thailand and Vietnam are better than that with Cambodia since the two countries are backbone powers to balance the rise of China. Therefore, the U.S. may not be a good fit for Cambodia to consider as a counterweight against its neighbors. Meanwhile, Cambodia's strategic interests converge with that of China. In particular, one of the Chinese security objectives has been keeping its southern neighbor Vietnam in check and minimizing its power in the region. Consequently, while Cambodia regards China as a countervailing mechanism against its neighbors, Cambodia itself has become China's great partner in projecting its influence in Southeast Asia.

In conclusion, Cambodia's foreign policy with the U.S. and China is complex and can be understood through layers of the country's geopolitics. Although it is quite compelling to join the popular misconception that Cambodia is a "Chinese puppet" or under the "Chinese orbit", it is crucial to explain Cambodia's policy actions towards the two great powers from different perspectives. As a result, this research posits that due to its strategic location as a smaller state, Cambodia has been under constant quest for survival, and it eventually binds Cambodia to seek for a third power to minimize such challenges. Although this strategic choice has put Cambodia at risk of losing balance, it is a feasible option for now. Also, it would be impractical for Cambodia to try matching its military capability with the neighbors since such action is very costly and it has quite limited resources. Nevertheless, Cambodia must keep in mind that balance should not be lost as a repercussion would

be destructive for Cambodia since it has already experienced a painful lesson learnt in the Khmer Rouge regime.

In this regard, it is suggested that future study should focus on whether or not Cambodia has been diversifying its relations to avoid superpower's dominance in the country. Noticeably, there are only two countries achieving a high-level diplomatic status with Cambodia. Indeed, the first one is a "Comprehensive Strategic Partnership of Cooperation" with China. Also, Japan has been a good partner of Cambodia and hence, the status of Cambodia-Japan relations have been "Strategic Partnership". Interestingly, both have recently agreed to upgrade their relations to Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in the near future, which it is at the same level with Cambodia-China relations. This leaves a thought-provoking question to further investigate Cambodia's foreign policy amid the U.S.-China great power competition by adding another element into viewpoint.

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Abstract (Korean)

캄보디아는 외세의 영향아래 오랜 역사를 가지고 있다. 1953년 프랑스로부터 독립한 뒤에도, 지리적 위치에 얽매어 다시 냉전의 이데올로기 함정에 빠졌다. 캄보디아는 중립 정책을 추구하며 비동맹 운동에 동참했지만, 결국 베트남 전쟁에 말려들었다. 그 파급효과는 캄보디아를 자체적인 내전에 빠지게 했고, 수백만 명의 목숨을 앗아간 비극적인 대량학살 정권에 이르게 했다. 그에 비해 현재 강대국 경쟁의 지정학을 볼 때, 캄보디아가 곤경에서 벗어나기 위해 신중하게 행동하지 않는다면 같은 시나리오를 반복하는 것과 같은 양상일 뿐이다. 다만 캄보디아는 미국과 중국에 둘러싸여 있고, 두 이웃 국가인 태국과 베트남 사이에 끼어 있어 매우 미묘한 상황에 놓여있다.

따라서 본 논문은 이중 지정학적 분석 (dual geopolitical analysis)을 통해 강대국들의 권력 플레이 속, 캄보디아의 위치와 이익을 파악함으로써 캄보디아의 외교정책을 이해하고자 한다. 즉, 캄보디아의 미국과 중국 외교정책 (대지정학 - grand geopolitics)이 두 이웃 국가인 태국과 베트남 (현지 지정학 - local geopolitics)과의 관계에 묶여 있는 셈이다. 결과적으로 캄보디아는 태국과 베트남에 대항하기 위해 간접적인 균형 (indirect balancing) 전략을 채택해 정치적 계산을 신중히 하고, 강대국들을 중심으로 한 관계를 다각화하는 등의 전략을 시행할 필요가 있다. 그러나, 캄보디아와

초강대국들 사이의 상호주의나 전략적 일치성은 캄보디아와 그들 사이의 관계를 강화하거나 약화시킬 수 있다.

키워드: 캄보디아, 강대국, 외교정책, 지정학, 지리학, 외교사

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