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Reporting Cambodia in the Australian media : heroic 'journalism or neo-colonial' distortions?

Jefferson Lee

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Reporting Asia Series

Reporting Cambodia in the Australian Media: 'Heroic' Journalism or Neo-Colonial Distortions?

Jefferson Lee

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Reporting Asia Series
Reporting Cambodia
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Jefferson Lee

**Centre for Asian Communication,
Media and Cultural Studies
Director and Series Editor -
Dr. Brian Shoesmith**

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Introduction

This series of Occasional Papers is designed to bring to the attention of the reader work that focuses on Asian communication and culture. Compared to most areas of Asian Studies, communication and media have been largely ignored, a fact the recent Australian 'push into Asia' reveals. These Occasional Papers redress this absence and deal with a comprehensive range of issues that inform our understanding of the importance of communication in forging links between Australia and Asia. Consequently their scope is far-reaching, covering cultural, political, economic, and increasingly, technological topics and their relationship to the communication process that lies at the heart of Australian/Asian relations. In short, they will chart a new emerging mediascape in the Asia Pacific region. As such they must be viewed as work in progress. The authors published in this series include academics, journalists and post-graduate students from Australia and throughout Asia.

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1. Introduction

Australia did not discover Cambodia until after the Second World War. In the early 1950s 'Indochina' was just becoming part of the Australian strategic map. In the wake of the Chinese revolution, the Korean War and the collapse of French Indochina at Dien Bien Phu, Australia's 'Cold Warriors' were alerted to the new potential threats to our North. To counter these threats the ANZUS and SEATO Treaties were signed, coupled with anti-communist repression on the home front. In this political environment the media closely followed the dictates of the conservative Menzies Government in Asian affairs and foreign policy.

The 'Anglophile' Australian media were far from being 'Asia literate'. Throughout the fifties and early sixties foreign affairs reporting closely mimicked the British and American 'neo-colonialist' lines with few exceptions. Indochina in this period was far from newsworthy. A survey of the *Sydney Morning Herald* between 1959-61 revealed on average no more than six news entries on Cambodia annually.¹ On the other hand, Indonesia, with the West Irian crisis and fears that Suharto's 'Guided Democracy' would throw up a dictator on our doorsteps competed with the perennial fear of China as the dominant 'Asian' issues in the Australian press.

All this changed with the commitment of Australian ground troops to Vietnam to support the American effort in 1965. Vietnam was in the news, and along with the conscription debacle became a major media issue in the 1966 Federal elections. The Vietnam War compelled media institutions to improve their coverage of both the war and the region as a whole. In spite of this development, Cambodia remained the insignificant 'sideshow' and backwater. It was not until 1970, with Sihanouk's overthrow and US-ARVN ground troops expanding the Vietnam conflict into 'neutral' Cambodia, that coverage increased. The US troops withdrawing two months later from Cambodia marked the start of another decline in news coverage. Nixon's 'Vietnamisation' program, and then Watergate, took centre stage as the big US television and wire services continued to swamp the Australian coverage of events in Indochina. America's Vietnam and American news priorities were still 'The Main Game'.

In this context, the secret US aerial decimation of Cambodia remained a scanty footnote in the Australian media until it ceased in August 1973. It was only in the lead up and aftermath of the collapse of Phnom Penh in April 1975 to the Khmer Rouge forces, an event that eclipsed the fall of Saigon by two weeks, that global news media's attention was focused on Cambodia. It was yet again a short-lived focus. The new Democratic Kampuchea regime imposed a thorough media closure against the Western press. The news vacuum was replaced with speculation, black propaganda and some genuine horror stories of human suffering from border refugee testimonies. But Indochina on the whole faded from the international news pages as the West silently took stock of its historic defeat. Sporadic recriminations based on refugee accounts about the new regimes and war veteran legacies were featured periodically in the media. The enormous redevelopment and reconstruction problems of the Indochinese countries were ignored totally.

Indochina re-emerged with a vengeance as an international news event on the eve of Vietnam's Christmas 1978 - January 1979 invasion of Cambodia and China's 'teach them a lesson' counter-strike into Northern Vietnam the following months. The end of Democratic Kampuchea marked a massive schism in Asian and world Communist solidarity. From 1979 there was a gradual re-opening of Cambodia to the Western media. Thence followed a decade of selective, openly-partisan and ideologically-driven reporting of the Cambodia conflict as it became the centre-piece of regional and superpower rivalry. The Vietnamese troop withdrawal in October 1989 marked the beginning of a new media circus. The UN imposed diplomatic solution created visa openings for the 'scoop' hungry journalists of the world. The Western media itself at times became the issue with some observers drawing direct comparisons with the carpetbaggers and chequebook journalists that punctuated the Lon Nol period of the early 1970s.

Australian news coverage of Cambodia was now becoming more extensive. Freer access for both regional and Australian based correspondents, permanent Phnom Penh offices for wire services like Reuters and regional press and radio correspondents, like Sue Downie, meant a more reliable and consistent coverage of Cambodian affairs. Improved telecommunications after OTC's satellite hook up led to the first 'live' coverage of events witnessed on Australian television. But this was still sporadic coverage and orientated around big events like Sihanouk's return and the Khieu Samphan attack.

In spite of a professed re-orientation 'towards Asia' at the political level in Australia from the early 1990s and a direct military involvement through UNTAC, the improved flow of news on the ground from Cambodia faced the old stumbling blocs of a continuing Anglo-American and Eurocentric sense of priorities back in the Australian news rooms and editor desks. Royal family gossip, the slightest twitch in the White House or events in Moscow were still higher news priorities than events inside Cambodia.

The low priority of Cambodia allowed old practices to continue. Visiting reporters flowed in 'on assignment'. Often poorly briefed and harbouring the 'cultural baggage' of the Seventies and Eighties era, they repetitiously churned out the 'genocide' angle, Toul Sleng and Angkor Wat postcards, peppered with unconfirmed gossip gleaned from Hun Sen and UNTAC press aides which was usually thrown in as an afterthought to round off the report. There was very little serious in-depth reporting that explored the unresolved Khmer grievances created by the shortcomings of the UN peace plan. A few professional journalists briefed themselves with a modicum of Khmer language proficiency and attempted to dig out the real picture.

The historical legacy of newly arrived foreign correspondents being seduced, awed and fascinated by Cambodia, its Prince, its people and the temple Angkor Wat, was now being repeated. Like tourists in a strange land, imbued with the full canopy of Western preconceptions, the journalists were high on description but low on analysis. Edward Said's often cited denigration of Westerners for their 'Orientalism' was generally speaking an appropriate description of both the new breed and the old hands of the Cambodia school of journalism. There were exceptions of course. However, most new correspondents infused their reporting with predictable references to the exotica, the despots, the mystical and the yearned for universalism. All of which served merely to dress up the Western prejudice that permeated the political dross in their reports. A dross invariably introduced by the words "diplomatic sources said".

In short, many journalists revealed more about pre-existing Australian perceptions of this corner of Asia in their despatches than they did about any contemporary Cambodian political realities. The 'horror' of modern Cambodia, in the short space of time between the appearance of John Pilger's *Heroes* in the mid 1980s and Margaret Drabble's *The Gates of Ivory* in the early 1990s, had shifted its metaphor from the 'heroism of the messenger' to an 'imagined space for resolving Western conscience'.² As Robin Gerster noted in his review of the

Drabble book, there was a certain cultural capital that had accumulated around the modern Asian holocaust. And it was one that more than a few Western writers were willing to cash in on.

But more importantly, the Cambodian media legacy has its own *rite de passage* which each new correspondent must duly acknowledge before venturing into the somewhat unfathomable world of commenting on contemporary Cambodia affairs.³ The continued imposition of an 'outside solution' onto the Cambodian masses inevitably comes dressed up as 'international concern'. Rather than self-examine copy for evidence of paternalism or neo-colonialism at work the Western correspondent seeks refuge for their uncertainty and self-doubt by reference to some transcendental or universal message that purportedly lies beneath the modern Cambodian tragedy. Witness David Puttnam's use of John Lennon's song *Imagine* to end *The Killing Fields* movie.

But Puttnam's pairing of Western angst with Cambodian suffering was not original. The Australian novelist Maslen Williams travelled to Cambodia in 1969 on an Australian writer's grant. From the comfort of his Phnom Penh Hotel, unaware of the country about to be swept into the Vietnam War, he penned,

... The function that I have lately imposed upon myself as an Australian writer is to search this part of the earth for clues that may help to get us out of the maze in which we are all lost and wandering. I am one among many ill-equipped literary diggers who fossick in the unlikely waste places of this age for specimens of truth that may lead to some rich lode of understanding from which we may all someday, enrich ourselves the people of all races - and begin to live a finer, kindlier, more courageous and mutually creative way of life.⁴

The "Cambodia problem" has been with us for some decades now. An Australian approach of heavy involvement in Cambodian affairs was developed in the 1960s and carried through the 1970s. Australians of various persuasions have distinguished themselves, often with some degree of controversy, in both our journalistic and diplomatic exchanges with Cambodia. This 'finger on the pulse' trend intensified by the late 1980s with the emergence of a distinct Cambodia lobby in Australia consisting of diplomats, journalists, aid workers, academics and others who collectively moulded public opinion to accept a 'New Standard Consensus' or revisionist view of contemporary Cambodian history. While the American media had an agenda-set, a Western media consensus of 'bloodbath'

and 'genocide' as the standard perjorative descriptions for the new regimes in the immediate post-1975 period emerged,⁵ the new media brokers or 'revisionists' sought to rewrite history with their own post-1979 version. The media-speak of the 'revisionists' involved creating a new consensus, one which exculpated Vietnam by presenting their invasion of Cambodia as a variety of humanitarian rescue.⁶

Today the supporters of the New Standard Consensus still have the upper hand. The proof of this is in the shifting media agenda for reporting Cambodia. An UNTAC force was sent to Cambodia ostensibly to verify the Vietnamese withdrawal and oversee the implementation of a peace plan. Now, most observers advocate that its fundamental function should be to contain the growth and influence of the Khmer Rouge faction. Were this just a case of bringing a recalcitrant party to the peace agreement back into line then there would be no qualms. But as the study below shows the new media agenda is a prescriptive one, one that insists that only certain outcomes are permissible, rather than one that impartially allows the Khmer to decide.

The Western media worked to ensure the main beneficiaries of that 'humanitarian rescue', (the Hun Sen's circle), emerge as the victors of the current power struggle in Phnom Penh that climaxed in the May 1993 election. The real problem lay in deciding whether the ultimate beneficiaries of this remoulding of Western opinion will be the Cambodian people as a whole or some discredited elite that rules the country on behalf of themselves, or worse still, some foreign patron. Thus to expect more than a modest correlation between the way Cambodia is reported in Australia and the way events actually beset the average Cambodian may be unduly optimistic. To understand why this discrepancy exists we have to unravel the legacy of Australian (and Western) journalism on Cambodia. A legacy that, unfortunately, has often worked side-by-side with forces seeking to undermine, rather than support, the Khmer independence struggle.

2. The Sihanouk Period (1953-70)

Two Australians who distinguished themselves from early in the post-war years as prolific writers on Asian affairs were Wilfred Burchett and Denis Warner.⁷ Politically these writers were ideological opponents. Both had covered the Japanese war in the Pacific, the Korean War, the French Indochina War and naturally became deeply involved in the American and Australian debate over our growing military commitment to Indochina throughout the 1960s. Of the two, Burchett reported the war 'from the other side'. His reports were often controversial and since the Korean War he was much maligned in Australia by conservative politicians and newspaper editorialists alike for his efforts.

Despite such unpopularity Burchett was often much closer to the centre of action, in both the jungle warfare and the diplomatic sense. His close understanding of the inner-workings of both the Ho Chi Minh cabinet and the Sihanouk court gave him a unique Indochina perspective. Burchett first visited Cambodia in 1956⁸ and the following year wrote *Mekong Upstream*⁹ which was published in Vietnamese by Hanoi. It became "the first book about twentieth century Cambodian politics in any language".¹⁰ Where Burchett presented a vivid description of life in Phnom Penh where even he, like many other Western observers, 'romanticised' the Khmers.¹¹ Cambodianist Ben Kiernan criticised Burchett's 'socialist realism' (in his description of the people) and his 'socialist imagination' (unfounded conclusion on the unity of Chinese, Vietnamese and Khmers) as unduly simplistic, but credited his portrayal of Khmer society and its "low living standards and occasional fierce exploitation at the hands of powerful members of the elite."¹²

But if Burchett's seminal work on the origins of Khmer communism and independence had been flushed out in *Mekong Upstream*, so too was another centre-piece of Khmer politics - an understanding of Sihanouk's neutrality. Burchett offered rare insight as "his chapters on (Khmer neutrality) are based on his interviews with Sihanouk and his valuable eye-witness accounts of the third and fourth congress of Sihanouk's party, the Sangkum in 1956 and 1957." Here Burchett described US Ambassador McClintock's disastrous walk out from the

Third Congress before Sihanouk rose to speak and clumsy US pressure on Sihanouk to join SEATO. Burchett concluded the real irony of Cambodia's subsequent 'slide to the left', was that it was precipitated by "the outrageous behaviour of the US State Department and its representatives in Phnom Penh."¹³

Kiernan noted that Burchett felt, until then, Sihanouk would have preferred in foreign policy a "neutralist, independent Cambodia attached to the West", but then goes on to recount from Burchett's private correspondence to his father, how in May 1956, while in Hanoi, he interviewed Prime Minister Pham Van Dong on Cambodian neutrality where the replies so pleased Sihanouk he used them in all of Cambodia's national media.¹⁴ In this sense Burchett was both a player in the game and a close-handed observer of Cambodian politics.

From the opposite side of the political fence, Denis Warner's journalism was more in tune with the perspective of Australian and US military intelligence throughout his reporting career in Indochina. Naturally his writing gained a wider circulation in the daily Western press than that of Burchett. Warner had a deep insight into the developing peasant-based revolutionary warfare that steadily engulfed all of what was previously French Indochina, the nations of Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. But unlike Burchett, Warner did not champion this cause. His writing was often in the form of a damning prophesy, criticising the bungling expediency of Western policy. He offered strategic analysis and advice on how best to contain the growing peasant rebellions, to halt the advance of Asian communism. In terms of Cambodia, this involved an understanding of Sihanouk neutrality.

In *Reporting South-East Asia*, a Warner dateline "Pnom Penh February 1960", headed "The Prince on the tightrope", quoted Sihanouk outlining the rationale for Khmer neutrality as being akin to walking a tightrope. Warner added to this metaphor, "By his recognition of Communist China two years ago, Sihanouk seemed to have lost his balance in his delicate tightrope act." Proof came from the apparent pro-China line on the Tibet crisis and the 'anti-Americanism' of the Cambodian Ministry of Information.¹⁵ Thus Warner was sceptical of Sihanouk's denial of 'the Red Prince' label dubbed on him by the Western press.¹⁶ He berated Sihanouk's claim that the Cambodian and other Third World people would eventually "decide the fate of the under-developed countries". He equated 'neutrality' with 'soft on communism' and argued, "to many (Westerners) it still seems that Sihanouk has opened the country to the challenge of competitive coexistence on Communist terms and that Peking, not the people, will decide

Cambodia's fate."¹⁷ The spirit of Bandung and non-alignment seemed anathema to Warner.

Warner wrote extensively for the Australian press, most notably, the Melbourne *Herald*. His *Reporting South-East Asia* book included articles on Cambodia from the *American Reporter* magazine written between 1959 and 1966. In the prelude he described the the collapse of Anglo-American relations with Cambodia in the mid-1960s as "one of the sorriest Southeast Asian stories". He argued, Sihanouk's sense of "national pride" was "belatedly understood". Ignoring his own record, Warner added that some Western publications, notably *Time* and *Newsweek*, continued "to denigrate the prince and his country in terms apparently calculated to give the most offence", provoking the Sihanouk response of "shameful slanders".¹⁸

Such deference to the Prince from Warner was not an accident. In the book *Before Kampuchea*, former Australian diplomat and journalist, Milton Osborne, recalled how Warner himself had incurred the wrath of Sihanouk. When Warner first visited Cambodia as a journalist in 1960 he arrived in Phnom Penh in the company of the then Cambodian Ambassador to Australia, Poc Thieun and his nephew Poc Deuskoma. Warner's reportage of this visit to Cambodia, as it was subsequently published in an Australian newspaper, was found to be derogatory of the Royal family by Prince Sihanouk. Warner was banned from re-entering Cambodia and become the first of a long line of journalist casualties to cross Sihanouk.¹⁹

Sihanouk's periodic bans on the Western press reflected how many correspondents on assignment in Cambodia often did not realise fully that covering Cambodia was not the same as covering Vietnam. In Vietnam there were ground rules to avoid censored copy. In Vietnam there was a degree of certainty over what was acceptable coverage to the US military's media minders, the Saigon regime functionaries and the editors at home. The pattern in Cambodia reporting was less certain. The various CIA manoeuvres in neighbouring Laos kept Sihanouk wary of any who challenged his definition of Khmer neutrality. Nevertheless, until the US Embassy closed in 1965, the Sihanouk form of neutrality was an inclusive, rather than exclusive one with foreign aid and foreign visitors arriving in Phnom Penh from all points on the globe.

One journalist who successfully negotiated Sihanouk's quirky mannerisms and perceived volatility was the Australian cameraman and journalist Neil Davis. Davis in late 1963 was appointed the first Visnews cameraman in Southeast Asia.²⁰ Working out of Singapore from February 1964 he shared the ABC office.²¹ He first went to Cambodia in November 1964 to cover the independence celebrations. His footage of Angkor Wat for Visnews was shown to Prince Sihanouk whose interest in film led to a warm relationship between the two. It was useful for Davis in obtaining visas at latter dates when the country was semi-closed to journalists. On this 1964 trip Davis also met Burchett and taught him how to use a cinecamera. The result was Burchett filmed the Vietcong in action and Davis sold his footage to Visnews and later to CBS.²²

Burchett had moved to Cambodia from North Vietnam in September 1965 and resided in Phnom Penh for four years. When welcomed to Phnom Penh by Sihanouk he brought tidings from the President of the NLF (South Vietnam), Nguyen Huu Tho, and evidence of a Khmer Serai/CIA plan to overthrow Sihanouk's neutral government.²³ Such exploits became legendary and earned him the appellation of 'Public Enemy Number One' from Australian conservatives. The more adventurous Australian correspondents like UPI's Martin Stuart-Fox made contact with him and published his dissident voice in a series of short articles for *The Australian* newspaper.²⁴

Others weren't so lucky. In 1966 ABC correspondent Tony Ferguson and an ABC film crew managed to get into Cambodia which was officially closed to the Western media. Ferguson secured an interview with Wilfred Burchett and despatched the footage. As Tim Bowden noted in his biography of Neil Davis, "... Meanwhile, in Sydney, all hell broke loose. Burchett was regarded by many in Australia as a traitor - a view shared by the ABC's Controller of News. He ordered the Burchett film to be destroyed on arrival. It never even made the processing lab." Neil Davis, in Australia on leave in 1967, criticised ABC censorship in an interview granted to the ABC in Melbourne. The News Editor of the ABC in Sydney rebutted Davis. *The Australian* ran with the story and exposed the machinations of censorship in the 'free' Australian media.²⁵

3. The Lon Nol Period (1970-75)

The Neil Davis-ABC management confrontation over censorship was symptomatic of wider developments both inside Australian society and at the cutting edge of the war itself. In Vietnam the Western press corps by the late 1960s were highly cynical of the official line - whether from government or military level. Many came to adopt a position of open hostility to the American war effort. The widening of Vietnam's ground war into neutral Cambodia in 1970 was greeted by the Saigon press corps with incredulity. Many of them packed their bags and shifted to Phnom Penh to cover a new stage of a war they thought was winding down after 'Vietnamisation' signalled the American ground withdrawal some months before.

The coup which overthrew Prince Sihanouk in March 1970 and the US/ARVN land invasion in May 1970 put Cambodia squarely into the international spotlight. Western journalists flooded into Phnom Penh to cover what would be a five year civil war. Apart from Davis, other Australian journalists to grace the Hotel Royale in this period included many who were prominent in Australian media and political circles like Bruce Grant, Creighton Burns, Neil Jillett, Michael Richardson, Peter Hastings, Tony Joyce, John Pennington, Richard Carlton, Peter Couchman, Pat Burgess, Richard Palfreyman, Denis Warner, David Jenkins, Neil Kelly, John Pilger and Allan Dawson.²⁶

But news coverage from Cambodia in this period is best remembered by the camera work of Neil Davis, later immortalised on the David Bradbury documentary *Frontline*. Davis biographer Tim Bowden argued during this period Davis achieved "the most graphic combat footage of his career".²⁷ Indeed, Cambodian news coverage was often a more hazardous terrain than Vietnam. The battle lines were seldom clear and erupted unexpectedly from behind civilian lines. Tim Bowden noted that most newsmen covering the action in Cambodia were wounded more than once.²⁸ In October 1974 Davis himself wrote a despatch for the *Far Eastern Economic Review* where he noted that nine pressmen had been killed up to that time in the Cambodia war and that twenty two foreign pressmen were missing.²⁹

Bowden claims Davis maintained his political neutrality throughout his Cambodia encounters. But Davis reputedly picked up a weapon on one occasion to help defend a Cambodian government (Lon Nol army) position that was about to be overrun because he knew “few reporters survived capture by the Khmer Rouge” as “prisoners were seldom taken.”³⁰ Later on in the Davis biography Bowden recounts how Davis attempted to suppress this story when on leave in Australia, denying its authenticity to enquiring local journalists.

Bowden excuses Davis here with the comment that if Davis felt he was perceived as less than impartial back in Cambodia it could jeopardise his future mobility to report the war. But after Davis’ death in Bangkok in the mid - 1980s, Bowden ventured to the Thai border camp and interviewed former Lon Nol military strongman, now leader of the anti-communist KPNLF, one General Dien Diel. In his article for *The Australian* on the meeting, Bowden acknowledged uncritically General Diel’s claim that Davis was a close supporter of the KPNLF’s political program and the friendship between the two stretched back to the Lon Nol days.³¹

Ironically, given this retrospective revelation about the possible political allegiances of Neil Davis, it was the political Left and not the anticommunist lobby in Australia who benefited most from the popularising the memory of the heroic camera work of Neil Davis during the Indochina wars. While Bradbury’s *Frontline* backed up the claim to neutrality, the decision of Davis to cover the wars with ARVN and Lon Nol troops was construed in Australia as confirmation that it was “their war” and not that of the Americans and the Australian junior partner. The respect that Davis expressed for the tenacity of the defeated armies of the ARVN and Lon Nol regime stood in contrast to his cynical view of the American reliance on military technology. It was a view that reinforced the Left argument that the locals were pawns of the Americans.

Even more significant was Bowden’s claim that Davis maintained a healthy respect for the Vietcong in Vietnam even though he travelled with their opponents the ARVN in the battlefield. As noted above, it was not a respect that extended to their communist comrades in neighbouring Cambodia.³² This may not be so surprising given that Davis was not covering Vietnam during early 1975 routing of the ARVN’s positions when the NVA - led assault generated a massive civilian panic and a hostile Western press over the high casualty rate. Instead Davis was in Phnom Penh witnessing similar violence from inside the besieged city.

As the Khmer Rouge encircled Phnom Penh in early 1975 they mounted a general rocket attack on the city. Davis filmed one of the most horrific incidents - a direct hit on a school on 6 February 1975. He agonised whether to film or help with the bodies, "I felt revulsion and anger against the Communists. At the same time I knew I must cover this story to get the best possible stark and bloody film, to show exactly what the people of Cambodia had to put up with. After the war ended, it became apparent that the Khmer Rouge were the most repressive and bloody regime of recent times, so it wasn't surprising in retrospect that they did what they did before the end of the war."³³

With more than a touch of irony, Davis met two of Australia's opposition politicians Andrew Peacock and Ian Sinclair after they had flown into Phnom Penh on 1 April 1975 on a 'fact finding mission'. Peacock used his influence with the Americans to assist Davis in flying out of Phnom Penh just days before the collapse and the beginning of Democratic Kampuchea.³⁴ Davis went on to make history, returning to Saigon in time to film the first NVA tank crashing through the gates of the Presidential Palace, the symbolic event that signalling the final end of the Vietnam War.

4. The Democratic Kampuchea Period (1975-78)

The fall of Phnom Penh to the Khmer Rouge in April 1975 marked a new period of closure as far as Western media coverage of Cambodia was concerned. It marked also a qualitative shift in tone of what news was despatched about the war torn country. The horrors of war became the horrors of 'genocide'. A recent film documentary³⁵ revealed there was a concerted campaign by key leading newspapers of the Western world to saddle up the new Democratic Kampuchea regime with labels like 'bloodbath', 'genocide' and 'one million executions' well in advance of any substantial evidence to support such claims. Henry Kissinger, the architect of the massive US bombing of Cambodia, was quoted in *The Age* as deriding the 'genocide' inside Cambodia just days after the Khmer Rouge victory.³⁶

The Western media elites, primarily through the news flow of the international wire services, invoked an 'atrocities' syndrome whenever reference was made to the new Democratic Kampuchea regime. This campaign was based on little proven corroborated evidence at that stage. Reductionist speculation and stereotypical journalism became the norm of what was at best scanty reporting. Democratic Kampuchea chose to ignore Western public opinion to its own detriment.³⁷ Two texts based on interviews with Khmer refugees leaving Democratic Kampuchea for the Thai border refugee camps over the following eighteen months achieved notoriety in this regard. They were the John Barron and Anthony Paul's *Murder of a Gentle People* which found a global circulation through *Reader's Digest* magazine and the French priest, Father Ponchaud, with his *Cambodia Year Zero*. Both books, based extensively on refugee testimonies, were reviewed widely in the Western press. Their mass circulation ensured the status of the definitive standard reference texts on Democratic Kampuchea's gross violations of human rights. The Australian based academic, Michael Vickery, later coined the phrase "Standard Total View" (of Cambodia) to describe the emergence of this media orthodoxy.

The fall of Phnom Penh was recorded by a number of Western journalists who had remained behind in the French Embassy after 17 April, 1975 collapse of the Lon Nol regime. The escapades of these journalists later became immortalised in the popular memory by the 1984 Hollywood film *The Killing Fields*. The docu-drama style of this Hollywood production was problematic. On the surface its dominant theme, the heroism of the Western journalists versus the despotic and faceless Third World Asian dictators, coincided too neatly with Hollywood's other mythical post-war celluloid reconstructions of Indochina to totally measure up to its claim to 'truth'. But Academy awards and 'real life' characters from the scripted story were powerful enough to override any serious academic criticism of what was in many ways an Orientalist and racist soap opera.

Thus the reconstruction of history through Hollywood's *The Killing Fields* became canonised as the official documentary history of the fall/liberation of Phnom Penh. Producer David Puttnam claimed his film was true to the original Sydney Schanberg storyline. The problem for historians today is deciding how much of the fragments offered by the Western journalist storyline - from correspondents like Sydney Schanberg and John Swain - can safely claim the status of authenticity, presenting the 'whole picture', or even part truth, from what was the turmoil and maelstrom of revolution in Cambodia April 1975.

The *New York Times* correspondent, Sydney Schanberg, and *The Times* (London) correspondent, John Swain, emerged later as the most prolific of the bewildered bevy of journalists arriving by road at the Thai border in early May 1975 after being expelled from the French Embassy compound by the new regime. Within hours of reaching Thailand, the syndicated articles on the capture of Phnom Penh, written by journalists like Swain and Schanberg were widely republished in the overseas and Australian press.³⁸ Their accounts, based as they were on rumours about the evacuation of the capital and some observations of the countryside during their dash for the border, were validated retrospectively by the 1984 release of *The Killing Fields* which retold their story from their own vantage position.

The Schanberg/Swain view of the new Democratic Kampuchea regime as it appeared in the Australian press was highly critical. They speculated that the takeover of Phnom Penh and its subsequent evacuation was in all likelihood a 'bloodbath'. More cautious and sceptical accounts from the American freelancer Richard Boyle and the Australian academics Shane and Chou Meng Tarr were ignored by the Western media.³⁹ This was despite the fact these people had at

least experienced the new Cambodia from outside the French Embassy. Yet Schanberg and Swain, compiling their syndicated reports from inside the French Embassy, were credited as the only Western witnesses to the rustification of Cambodia.

As the Englishman John Swain flew into Phnom Penh from Bangkok on the last flight to land in before the Khmer Rouge took over,⁴⁰ Neil Davis was flying out to Bangkok. Davis briefly re-entered Cambodia from the Thai border to film the Khmer Rouge taking Poipet on 19 April. He was then bundled back over the border into Thailand.⁴¹ From the Thai border Davis departed the growing contingent of journalists gathering there and slipped back into Vietnam to record the fall of Saigon on 30 April 1975.⁴² Meanwhile the Thai border emerged as a key listening post for news from inside the new Democratic Kampuchea. Initially some journalists crossed over to see for themselves. As the border became sealed it was a case of relying on reports from escaping refugees and monitoring Khmer Rouge radio. The entourage from the French Embassy emerged to a huge media fanfare in early May 1975 with heroic tales of their daring deeds to be lapped up by a global media.

Joining these ranks at the end of his appointment to Beijing was the ABC journalist Paul Raffaele. Raffaele's report, when viewed in retrospect typified what became the 'Standard Total View' on Cambodia reporting. His assertion as to the trail-blazing nature of his brief trip inside Democratic Kampuchea bears the familiar imprint of a war correspondent in search of the dangerous mission. Headed "Do you know the penalty for this crime?" the radio report was broadcast on the ABC's Correspondents Report July 1975.⁴³ A written version appeared six years later in the anthology *Then and Now: ABC Correspondents Abroad*. Raffaele claimed, "I broadcast my findings on ABC news and current affairs radio in Australia - and shortly afterwards heard Prince Norodom Sihanouk denouncing me by name on Radio Phnom Penh. The world press took up the story, swarming into the Thai border area with Kampuchea to seek out the gory details of Pol Pot's version of the 'Final Solution'."⁴⁴

Raffaele positions himself on the Thai side of the Kampuchea border near Aranyaprathet, "weighing up the likelihood of surviving to tell the story" should he breach the Khmer Rouge border patrol.⁴⁵ Armed with a valid Peking press card, Raffaele scrambles over the barb wire with a Thai translator in tow to become "the first Western journalist to set foot back in Kampuchea". He was confronted by soldiers who were all "about sixteen or seventeen", yet still

“seasoned fighters”. They were the same ones that “swarmed into Phnom Penh”. Next their superior arrives and accuses Raffaele of “violating the security of our border”. Then Raffaele conducts an interview with “the first senior Khmer Rouge official to talk to a Western correspondent since the takeover in Phnom Penh.”⁴⁶

In the Introduction Furlonger noted the impossibility of publishing or even retaining the huge volume of despatches that arrive from overseas to the ABC. Thus the book “pays only inadequate tribute to the correspondents who have kept Australians aware of what is going on in an often remote world.” The book is dedicated to “the many men and women whose bravery and suffering provided (the younger generation of journalists) with at least some semblance of a heritage-however imperfect.”⁴⁷

Raffaele states “... He was guarded and his replies were often deliberately vague; but he did confirm that the cities had been abandoned in a bid to force the people to adopt a primitive rural socialism. He went on to admit that education had been suspended, that families were being split up, and that an unknown number of ‘class enemies and agents of imperialism’ had been put to death.”⁴⁸ The interview apparently ends with the military commander of the Khmer Rouge western border division berating Raffaele, “You should not come into Kampuchea! We do not want your corrupt capitalist kind here! That is why we expelled all the others! You broke our law by coming into Kampuchea illegally! This time we will let you go because of our friendship with China! If there is a next time - we will kill you!”⁴⁹

Maybe the ABC’s editor did not wish to detract from his journalist’s scoop with its emphasis on the perilous nature of his correspondent’s journey.⁵⁰ However, even two years later, in 1977, that is as late as two years after the border closure, Australian freelance cameraman, Walter Burgess, working for Visnews, made three trips into so-called impenetrable Cambodia from different starting points along the Thai border side. Travelling with the right-wing Khmer Serai, Burgess penetrated between eight to thirty kilometres into the countryside. He shot film of canal diggings, villages, mines, and rotting bodies.⁵¹

The Raffaele story also recounts how “several” western yachtsmen, blown off course, were taken to Phnom Penh, “tortured and killed”.⁵² But the final written edition of the Raffaele story fails to edit “several” yachtsmen down to “two” yachtsmen to make it historically accurate. This would appear imperative. The

incident had not even occurred in July 1975. Its inclusion in the 1981 printed edition suggests additions were made to the original Raffaele radio despatch to embellish it. Presumably, such additions were inserted by Furlonger, the book's editor. If so, did not Furlonger have a responsibility to make those additions as accurate as the contemporaneous record allowed? Indeed, the 1981 publication date fell after the date the Australian press first headlined the story of the missing Australian yachtsmen captured by the Khmer Rouge. Otherwise why tamper at all with the 1975 despatch?

A similar objection arises over the Raffaele story being loaded up with the familiar clichés and expressions that punctuated other anti-DK reporting in the 1977-80 period in the works of John Pilger, Barron/Paul and Ponchaud. The Raffaele story recounts events with a depth of knowledge that had not entered the established record at the time of his reporting. Examples abound, such as, "... Mercilessly, these 'children of the revolution' swept Phnom Penh and Kampuchea's other cities clean of people, forcing them at gun-point out into the countryside. The ill and the dying were dragged from their hospital beds and made to march or to crawl along with the other hundreds of thousands of terrified men, women and children on their way to the new 'socialist reality'.

*... Those who collapsed by the wayside were disposed of. The lucky ones were bayoneted or shot. The majority were dragged into the bush and bashed to death with hoes and shovels. Those who survived were forced to hack new villages out of the jungle, living on starvation rations until the crops they had just planted should be capable of harvesting. And when that occurred, they still received only one small tin of rice per person, per day, provided they behaved themselves ... The new Jerusalem became a gigantic charnel-house as those who had served the previous government, those who had been misguided enough to acquire an education ... were systematically tortured and beaten to death in their hundreds of thousands.*⁵³

We could ask where Raffaele got all this information just two to three months after 17 April 1975? He claims to have "spent my first few weeks at the border, talking to many of the thousands of refugees streaming across from the new Communist state." He claims he was "sceptical at first" but as the stories were repeated "by new refugees pouring through more and more boltholes in the border" he was "convinced of the truth of their horrifying tales."⁵⁴ Whatever stories Raffaele was able to glean in this brief interlude up to July 1975 on the Thai border the reliability of the above account is more in keeping with an early

1980s consensus than with the confusion and uncertainty of the first few months after April 1975.

Like Raffaele, most US and UK sourced accounts of the early years of the DK regime were characterised by unmitigated hostility of the Raffaele variety. The Asian regional press was a little more circumspect and speculative. For example, the respected regional weekly the *Far East Economic Review* gave a guarded, but critical, overview of the first year of the DK rule in its 29 October 1976 edition. It read, "Throughout 1976, the KCP appeared to be capable of supporting those people it chose to support at around subsistence level." The account added, "...this was no mean achievement given that Washington estimated that one million Cambodians would starve. Perhaps fewer than 25% of that number actually starved in 1975-76".⁵⁵

Given that inside Democratic Kampuchea was effectively sealed off from the Western media between 1975-78, it was not surprising that many supporters of the Indochinese revolutions remained unconvinced by the 'sour grapes' of the vanquished superpower and its press minions epitomised by the wire services. The mainstream Australian press generally followed the lead of AAP, Reuters and AP news flow with its barrage of criticism on the new Democratic Kampuchea regime. While stories like the Raffaele one were the norm there were still sceptics in the West including Australia.

A handful of the more serious researchers sought to establish the 'real truth'. The method was to search for contradictions amongst the plethora of anti-Khmer Rouge propaganda surfacing in the Western media. This belated defence of DK was later referred to by scholar Micheal Vickery as 'the literature of denial'. It was the reverse side of the prejudicial press distortions. In Australia, the Cambodianist academic Ben Kiernan exposed as fakes some press photos of an alleged Khmer Rouge execution of civilians. The photos were actually staged in Thailand and then distributed to the foreign press in return for money. But his exposure was found not in the offending daily press, which published and republished the photos above a conflicting array of captions, but in journals with minuscule circulation like the *Melbourne Journal of Politics* and *News From Kampuchea*.⁵⁶

The most detailed sifting through of the Western press coverage of Democratic Kampuchea between the years 1975-78 was performed by the noted American scholar Noam Chomsky. In a detailed study called *The Reconstruction of an*

Imperial Ideology: The Political Economy of Human Rights (Volume Two), published in early 1979, he attempted to show that much of the media on Democratic Kampuchea was little more than 'distortions at third hand' where unreliable refugee accounts of atrocities had been hastily gleaned, unethically extrapolated, and then repeatedly circulated, as the media's 'standard total view'.⁵⁷

It was not until late 1978 when US journalists Elizabeth Becker from the *Washington Post* and Richard Dudman from the *St Louis Despatch* joined the Dutch-born academic Malcolm Caldwell in a visit to Democratic Kampuchea that the hope of an independent assessment from Western media observers emerge.⁵⁸ But Caldwell's assassination by unknown gunmen dampened this hope. Becker and Dudman's reports in the US press were reprinted subsequently in *The Australian* but only as a backdrop to coverage of the Vietnamese invasion which had begun as the delegation departed Phnom Penh. Both journalists were critical of the human rights record of the DK regime, but Dudman confirmed that Western news reports appeared to have been exaggerated for propaganda purposes.⁵⁹

5. The Post-Invasion Media Story (1979-91)

The Vietnamese invasion of Kampuchea in 1979 occurred during the highpoint of the Fraser led Liberal Government's geo-strategic orientation in foreign policy. It was a period of heightened superpower rivalry between the US and the USSR which climaxed with the invasion of Afghanistan and the rise of Reaganism in the USA. To traditionalists on the Left and left liberal intellectual circles it was the 'Second Cold War'.⁶⁰ In this period Vietnam was defined as a pawn of the Soviet Union. Its invasion of Democratic Kampuchea was confirmation to political conservatives of both the old 'Domino Theory' and the 'Soviet thrust' into Asia.⁶¹

Vietnam, while widely condemned by Western politicians and editorialists for its invasion, was still considered by many in the West as the "acceptable face of Asian communism". This was because the alternative, a continuation of Democratic Kampuchea under Pol Pot, was perceived as a darker option. Left opinion was initially divided. Academic Gavan McCormack appraised the relative merits of the defence case for Democratic Kampuchea in the Melbourne intellectual journal *Arena*, under the heading 'The Problem of Knowing the Truth'.⁶² In summary, he condemned the human rights record of the DK but conceded the advent of black propaganda spread by the invading Vietnamese probably ensured a clean weighing up of the evidence over the 1975-78 years would now be more difficult.

But the issue was cloudy for the strategically-minded media analysts as well. The choice between two evils (DK and Hanoi) found more than a few accepting that Vietnam could become a bulwark against a resurgent *Killing Fields*. This uncertainty led to what *Cambodia Watching* called 'elite ambivalence' in Australia's media institutions. There was a clear proprietorial division over what was to be the correct response to the rights and wrongs of both the Vietnamese 'invasion' and the Pol Pot 'genocide'.⁶³ Hard-liners saw the issue in terms of East-West Bloc politics. But an increasing number of print media commentators - foreign affairs journalists and leading academics - switched from their 'anti-communism' premise of the earlier Vietnam War days to a new 'understanding' of Hanoi's geo-strategic move into Kampuchea.

Such a turn around, increasingly reflected in editorial positioning throughout the 1980s as the PRK position became more secure, owing its initial success to the new information brokers of the Cambodia conflict the aid workers, the documentary filmmakers, the academic Cambodian specialists and selected journalists - most of whom reinforced a "New Standard Consensus". The key aspect of which was to play down the shortfall of Vietnam's proteges in Phnom Penh, lest public criticism contribute to a resurgence of the Khmer Rouge. They filtered the news in a way that presented the Phnom Penh authorities (PRK/SOC) as a variant of Western liberalism while the opposing factions in the Resistance (DK/CGDK/NGC) were depicted as savages, uncivilised, terrorists, murderers, Hitlerites, etc. Undoubtedly, the appalling track record in human rights of the DK regime made this task much simpler.

A leading player here was the Australian expatriate and high profile journalist John Pilger. He was one of the first Western journalists allowed into the Vietnamese controlled Kampuchea in mid-1979, ostensibly to assist the UK based NGO Oxfam. From this visit Pilger filmed the aftermath of Vietnamese invasion as the country lay in waste as a result of the war that had disrupted crop planting and also precipitated massive mobilisation and dislocation of the people. In his widely acclaimed documentary, *Cambodia Year Zero*, Pilger sheeted home the entire blame onto the Khmer Rouge. *Cambodia Year Zero* shocked the world and was a propaganda coup for the PRK and the Vietnamese.⁵

The relative inertia of the press in reporting the DK years was now compensated for in 1979 by massive press exposure through wire service photos of *The Killing Fields*. Positive as this development was in redressing the balance of the previous years it was still liable to ideological distortion. The new lexicology of "Pol Pot regime", "genocidal maniac", "irreversibility" and "comprehensive settlement" sprung up in the media as an impediment to serious analysis from any side. Sloganeering replaced debate as the much needed aid deliveries to Cambodia and the refugees on the Thai border became a media centre-piece in the controversy over the morality of invasion versus the morality of human rights abuses.⁶

In late 1979 the *Melbourne Herald* serialised Pilger's "Asian Holocaust" spread from his *London Daily Mirror* expose. Before long the 'Pilger effect' of crusading journalism meant all news reports on the Cambodia war from Bangkok, Singapore, Phnom Penh or even Australia were obliged to lead with reductionist commentary as "responsible for the deaths of over one million people" within the leading paragraphs. Politically, however, this shock

journalism was not standardised until the more 'middle-of-the-road' journalists like Micheal Richardson adopted it. A pile of skulls graphic adorned his mid-1980 front page report for the Melbourne Age. The Age editorialised in favour of Australia's de-recognition of the DK Government at the UN General Assembly vote in the same issue. Pressure mounted with Pilger's *Cambodia: Year One* screened towards the end of 1980. It claimed the Cambodians were suffering because of the Western diplomatic logjam preventing humanitarian aid reaching the people.

The Cambodia debate in Australia coincided chronologically with the Liberal Party leadership struggle between Andrew Peacock and Malcolm Fraser. In February 1981 the leadership issue came to a head as Peacock resigned the Foreign Ministry over a policy difference with Fraser on Cambodian 'de-recognition'. Peacock had earlier chosen on the high rating *60 Minutes* current affairs television program to launch a frontal attack on Fraser over Cambodia. Peacock forced Fraser's hand and delivered Australia's Cambodian policy up to the pro-Phnom Penh lobby. Fraser's geo-strategic viewpoint was now 'on the nose' as far as the media was concerned. The Cambodia policy was now driven by the domestic media's revulsion against the Khmer Rouge human rights abuses and not by Prime Ministerial and Cabinet solidarity with the US and ASEAN vision of regional security.

But the United Nations sponsored International Conference on Kampuchea in late 1981, Vietnam boycotted, and the ASEAN-sponsored formation of the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea in June 1982 which gave the DK a veneer of respectability that the pro-Phnom Penh media lobby found hard to dislodge. As media academic Rod Tiffen noted:

*... Since the Australian government announced its derecognition of Pol Pot, the news coverage about Kampuchea has been accurate in detail but misleading in drift. Most reporting about Kampuchea has been centred on the reporting of official statements and diplomatic actions of countries opposed to Vietnam, seeking its withdrawal from Kampuchea! Despite editorial stances to the contrary, we have had neutral reporting of these diplomatic and political initiatives with little indication not only that they lack reality, but that if they were effective in removing Vietnam from Kampuchea, they would increase the instability of Kampuchea and the misery of its people. The result has been the accurate reporting of diplomatic fictions. This is a dilemma for the press and one that shows its vulnerability.*⁶⁵

Tiffen here shows one side of the complexity of reporting Cambodia during the 1980s, when the on-going war cost well over a hundred thousand military and civilian casualties, but because it didn't match the scale of destruction and loss of human life of the 'Pol Pot period' it remained poorly reported.⁶⁶ In short, there were either other more pressing international calamities or the media had relegated the issue to the backburner. The noted English journalist William Shawcross toured Australia later and contextualised this as Western 'compassion fatigue' and 'political amnesia' where global crises are news today gone tomorrow.

On the other hand, Cambodia had remained as a centre-piece or a 'pawn' of global and regional diplomacy at a time of massive shifts and challenges in the international power balances in the mid-1980s. Hence reporting of diplomatic initiatives, and inter alia 'diplomatic fictions', reflected both the posturing of great powers in the media and the sensitivity between the Khmer belligerents over the nuances of any settlement terms.⁶⁷ (Often the argument was about seating arrangements at conferences!). It was a sensitivity that the specialist journalists pursued with professional skill but was largely lost on the editors, sub-editors and general public with their desire for easy solutions. Similarly, the diplomatic response to the 'Cambodia problem' often underpinned trade offs in a host of other bilateral areas. For example, Australia's high profile on Cambodia, as far as Indonesia was concerned, was predicated on our soft-peddalling the East Timor issue. Again the subtleties escaped the quick-fix school of journalism.⁶⁸

The desire for simple answers partially explains the success of people like John Pilger who could reduce everything into a sequence of television frames and emotive pleas so that the public 'understood'. But his presentation of the issues to a viewing or reading audience in a 'black or white' manner, without any shades of grey, soon led Pilger's critics to cry foul and accuse him of promoting 'diplomatic fictions' as well. The leading Pilger critic in Australia was the conservative commentator Gerard Henderson. In a typical anti-Pilger press commentary Henderson picked up on the British press attack on Pilger's *Cambodia Year II: The Betrayal*.⁶⁹ Henderson challenges what he called the Pilger conspiracy theory where, "Such a complicated scenario (as Cambodia) lends itself easily to conspiracy theories, at which John Pilger excels - witness his claim that a 'trinity' comprising "Pol Pot, Washington and Peking - assisted by the likes of Singapore, Britain and (apparently) Australia - is taking ill defined actions which will see the Khmer Rouge restored to power."⁷⁰

The only point of agreement between the Pilger and Henderson camps was over Foreign Minister Hayden's 1986 proposal for a Genocide Tribunal which was pushed heavily in the media by academics and aid workers to bring Pol Pot to an international court for 'genocide'. But even here the Henderson camp sought to tar the Phnom Penh authorities (many of whom were ex-Khmer Rouge) with the same brush. The media high point of this 'genocide' debate was in the 1987-88 period when Hayden's successor Senator Evans refused to succumb to Australia pushing the initiative. Evans had reservations that were partly technical, partly hypocritical - a desire to appease ASEAN, particularly Indonesia over East Timor, and an unwillingness to totally surrender the Khmer Rouge card to Hanoi and the PRK except in the context of a full settlement of the Cambodia issue.⁷¹

The Evans peace plan, in the wake of the Vietnamese withdrawal in September 1989, required a further tactical retreat on the Genocide Tribunal issue, if only to bring the Khmer Rouge faction into the peace plan. This plan saw a further redefining of the media's elite consensus as now Evans was obliged to defend his imaginative peace plan against Pilger and others who argued it was a 'Trojan Horse' for the Khmer Rouge regaining power. Evans sought to use diplomacy to engineer simultaneously a pro-US, pro-PRK solution that required constant fine tuning. Otherwise media attention was deflected away from history and reality (the on-going ground war) towards diplomacy media-speak.⁷²

The media greeted the UN peace plan with mild euphoria, as did Canberra's public relations mill. Attention switched to a threatened military re-emergence of the Khmer Rouge. As this threat intensified in the media the Vietnamese and PRK dug in and quibbled over the fine points of the peace plan that would foist power sharing with erstwhile enemies upon them.

6. The UN Cambodia Peace Plan (1990-93)

a) Press Optimism on the Cambodian Peace Plan

As noted in the earlier section the media coverage of the Cambodian war centred more on the endless round of international diplomatic meetings aimed at reaching a negotiated solution. From the international conference in Paris held in August 1989 the Western media contingent that followed these talks became a key player. They relished the opening up of Cambodia to outsiders when the Paris Conference despatched an interim UN military inspection mission to Cambodia and the border camps under the Norwegian General Vadset. Sympathetic coverage of the Phnom Penh administration during this mission set a precedent that ensured the massive Western press contingent was allowed into Cambodia to 'monitor' the official 'final' Vietnamese troop withdrawal at the end of October 1989.

The international press were satisfied the Vietnamese troops had fully withdrawn but the Khmer Rouge and other resistance factions still insisted on UN verification. Not surprisingly, when the Khmer Rouge made 'significant military gains' after the withdrawal date there was a "backlash in the West" where there was "waning political support" for the resistance armies. *Far East Economic Review* journalist Nate Thayer maintained the Khmer Rouge, in particular had always faced a "vocal rather cacophonous rejection of any developments" that assisted their return to power. But this Western opposition "underestimated the extent of sympathy that continues to exist for the Khmer Rouge and their programs" and this unacknowledged fact would result in an undermining of the "prospects for a workable, sustained solution".⁷⁵

If one wanted to find evidence of press coverage designed to isolate the Khmer Rouge and drive them away from the peace table it would be hard to surpass the Australian press in this period. The diplomatically reached solution in Cambodia was generally celebrated, and Australian journalists persisted with their dual theme of alienating and vilifying the Khmer Rouge faction as much as possible. The peace talks at Pattaya in July and August 1991 bringing the four Khmer factions together were a case in point.

The meetings themselves were greeted optimistically by the Australian press.⁷⁴ But coverage of the talks in Australia continually ignored presenting any analysis of the progress of the confidence building measures aimed at achieving a workable solution. Instead the 'Pol Pot factor' was used to dress up what was otherwise rather thin copy. Sam Lipski in *The Bulletin* devoted almost an entire page length column in the national weekly to a rumour that Pol Pot was in Pattaya, only to conclude, that even if the rumour was "totally erroneous", it still showed "US intelligence sources" were worried that the "Khmer Rouge remain strongly in the picture."⁷⁵ *The Age* correspondent Lindsay Murdoch, reporting on the second round of talks in August, continued this media obsession with Pol Pot's whereabouts. His despatch "Reporters hunt for mysterious Pol Pot"⁷⁶ was given the same prominence as the much more immediate and serious issue "Hun Sen to clash with US over peace plan."⁷⁷

The alternative issue, optimism over the prospect of peace, gained even greater media prominence following the 'Perm 5' (UN Security Council) meeting endorsing the progress of the Khmer factions. The *Telegraph Mirror* reported "Peace for Cambodia" and "The war is over- Sihanouk"⁷⁸. Less sensational was the *Sydney Morning Herald*⁷⁹ with "Peace talks end on hopeful note" and an editorial, "Sowing peace in the killing fields", where it was suggested the Phnom Penh Government was moving away from its hardline position of objecting to KR participation in the election process.⁸⁰ *The Age* editorial, "Welcome progress on Cambodia", was optimistic and endorsed the Evans proposal with:

*Proponents of the plan believe that involving Pol Pot's organisation in peaceful avenues of change is the only way to prevent a return to the years of bloodshed. So far so promising ... Senator Evans has been persistent in following through the initiative that the UN took as the basis for its proposal. He uses the phrase "niche diplomacy" to describe the task and Canberra's role. Khieu Samphan sees a lasting ceasefire ... as dependent on a UN monitoring force.*⁸¹

The Australian's editorial, "Playing our part in ending a nightmare", on the New York UN General Assembly meeting in September 1991 provided further optimism⁸². It began, "The elimination of the final obstacles to the signing of a settlement between the warring factions in Cambodia represents a victory for quiet Australian diplomacy. Senator Evans's strength has been to refine the methods of his predecessor (Hayden) and to work with our regional allies, particularly Indonesia ..."⁸³ The editorial concluded by noting a breakdown of order in Cambodia that may endanger our troops, but added we should have the "strength of our convictions" to ensure the peace plan is kept.⁸⁴

The *Weekend Australian* ran a commentary by Bangkok-based British journalist James Pringle, reporting from Phnom Penh, following the signing of the Paris Accords in late October 1991.⁸⁵ Pringle reported "cautious optimism" under the heading "Phnom Penh awaits new peace". He noted the widespread availability of guns in the capital and the fragile peace as the Cambodian masses awaited Prince Sihanouk's promised return. He added the taking down of Ho Chi Minh and Lenin portraits was "a symbol, perhaps, of an old order passing." Alan Boyd's despatch, "Treaty marks the beginning of the end of Asia's cold war", reported optimism from Hanoi where "Western diplomats say the breakthrough (in Cambodia) is expected to spark a flurry of activity by Vietnam which is anxious to heal the rift from the war with its suspicious neighbours."⁸⁶

In the wake of the UN decision, *The Bulletin's* Laurie Oakes praised Senator Evans and his department as "Deserving of praise".⁸⁷ Oakes criticised Liberal Opposition Foreign Affairs spokesman Robert Hill for his claim in July 1990 that "any comprehensive settlement involving a role for the Khmer Rouge was really not going to succeed." Oakes noted Hun Sen was to visit Australia "in recognition of our contribution". Yet there is an "extraordinary reluctance" on the part of the media and the Opposition to acknowledge this achievement. Oakes argued there was something in (the Evans plan) for "everyone except the Khmer Rouge." Even China would want to restore its international image in a post-Tiananmen era by "weaning themselves off overt support for Pol Pot".⁸⁸

In a move that won much applause from the Australian media and perhaps bloated the importance of journalists and politicians alike, Senator Evans persuaded the PRK/SOC's Prime Minister Mr Hun Sen to visit Australia before returning to Cambodia from Paris. The tour was a diplomatic success for both the Hun Sen faction and Senator Evans. On 27 October, Bruce Jones in his Extra column in the *Sun-Herald* claimed "Australia rescues a nation in turmoil" in a whole page of glowing commentary to Hun Sen and his chaperone Senator Evans.⁸⁹ Greg Sheridan was equally praiseworthy in *The Australian* where his article was headed (Senator Evans) "Midwife to a fragile Cambodian peace".⁸⁹ Nobody in the media even remotely suggested that Australia might be compromised in the eyes of the other Khmer factions.⁹⁰

At the same time the advanced contingent of Australian Peace Keeping Force troops were being readied to be sent to Cambodia. The day after Hun Sen arrived in Australia the *Sydney Morning Herald* Defence Correspondent Greg Austin informed "Aust troops for Cambodia told they won't have to fight."⁹¹ The report

carried a photo of Hun Sen and Evans, smiling side by side, during a joint press conference in Canberra. Hun Sen, captioned in the photo "The Cambodian Prime Minister" was more accurately referred to in the body of the article as "a member of Cambodia's Supreme National Council which includes representatives of the Phnom Penh Government and the three resistance factions".

The Austin article noted that Hun Sen assured Evans "that Australian troops would not get bogged down in any military quagmire" thus implying Hun Sen had sufficient control of the countryside to enforce such an undertaking. Austin noted a convergence of interests with his observation "Mr Hun Sen and Senator Evans debunked press speculation that the Khmer Rouge was still a strong force that could scuttle the peace plan". As columnist Frank Devine later revealed in *The Australian* the Hun Sen visit was arranged to shore up the credibility of the Evans Peace Plan and assuage public concern over the safety of Australian troops in their Peace Keeping role in Cambodia.⁹²

Implied in Hun Sen's comments was a guarantee that the Khmer Rouge would be nobbled under the Evans Plan. The Sydney *Sun-Herald* in late December 1991 provided further evidence. A number of academic supporters of Hun Sen indicated a switch from the Pilger hard-line view over to the Evans camp. Keith Gosman's article noted, "in a disastrous year for the Federal Government, the Foreign Minister's Cambodia initiative has gained Australia precious prestige in the international arena." Dr Adrian Vickers claimed Evans had won "an immense amount of respect" in the region. Dr Gary Klintworth, slightly more guarded, said, "although he didn't agree with the entire thrust of Senator Evans proposal (he) would not take anything away from him". Dr Stuart Fox gives the original impetus to Bill Hayden, but adds a "full marks" to Senator Evans. All three academics alleged the Khmer Rouge signed the agreement because of their "military weakness". Gosman warned the Khmer Rouge may still "spoil the Senator's diplomatic tea party" as Hun Sen's administration with its "considerable Western support, not the least from Australia" faced protests in Phnom Penh over "widespread and notorious corruption" wherein "the imposition of external solutions remains, as always, a part of the problem."⁹³

(b) Sihanouk's Return to Phnom Penh November - December 1991

After years of debunking Sihanouk for his refusal to be pinned down to a fixed diplomatic position the Australian press begrudgingly acknowledged the powerful symbolic role his return to Phnom Penh played in the peace process. The *Sydney Morning Herald* editorial "Cambodia's Next Experiment"⁹⁴ claimed Sihanouk's return marked "the end of Cambodia's long nightmare of death and destruction punctuated in the late 1970s only by a genocidal attempt at social experimentation." It also marked "a radical experiment" by the UN where "UN peace keeping forces will monitor the cease-fire and disarm the belligerents. UN administrators will run Cambodia's internal affairs until elections are held in 1993 and then oversee the transfer of power to a new government". It concluded, "Sometimes it is necessary to take a calculated leap into the unknown. This is one of those occasions."⁹⁵

Under the heading, "Return of the Profligate Son", Lindsay Murdoch, posed the question "*Can a bon vivant* who has spent the past 13 years in cosseted exile rescue a country devastated by war, disease and poverty?" This was the cover feature December issue of the *Good Weekend Magazine* circulated with both the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Age*.⁹⁶ Significantly, the article reported that the return of the first of the Khmer Rouge officials to Phnom Penh had occurred without incident. It noted the return of Khmer Rouge General Mao Sary from Bangkok with a photo caption that ran, "Large numbers of police together with poor communications initially minimised protests against the Khmer Rouge's return".⁹⁷

(c) The Khieu Samphan incident and the media November 1991

A Lindsay Murdoch article published the previous October, just two days before Khieu Samphan was due to arrive in Phnom Penh, was entitled in the *Sydney Morning Herald* as "Khmer Rouge puts damper on peace pact". It dismissed Khmer Rouge security fears surrounding the return to Phnom Penh of Samphan to take up his SNC role as an attempt to sabotage the implementation of the Paris peace agreement. Murdoch argued that Samphan's fears of assassination would "scuttle" the SNC meeting scheduled to be held soon after his scheduled arrival in Phnom Penh. He concluded on the point, "Hun Sen refused a Khmer Rouge

demand for a Vatican-like enclave, protected by UN soldiers....They should rent a villa and live in the city like anybody else, he said."⁹⁸

The next day, the *Weekend Australian* ran a more neutral heading, "Security threat to Khmer return", in a report from Phnom Penh by James Pringle who noted fears over security concerned not only the Khmer Rouge leaders but Prince Sihanouk's entourage as well. The report confirmed that both parties had every intention of taking up their SNC offices in Phnom Penh.⁹⁹ Son Sen, a political representative of the Khmer Rouge on the SNC, had already flown into Phnom Penh and taken up residence in the faction's compound. It was reported there were a few protestors outside but the event had passed without incident.¹⁰⁰

On 27 November, Khieu Samphan, the second D.K representative on the SNC, flew into the capital. The cavalcade from the airport was greeted with a peaceful student protest. However after arriving at the Khmer Rouge compound, a crowd outside violently ransacked the building, beat up Khieu Samphan and attempted to lynch him with a belt on the overhead light hanging. SBS-TV's *Dateline* program had their journalist Mark Carey on the spot. Reporting live via satellite on the attack on Khieu Samphan, Carey's agitated voice and exciting dialogue gave the impression that it was a spontaneous protest by a frenzied and enraged crowd. Neither Carey, nor for that matter Paul Murphy anchoring the program back in Sydney, could disguise their glee at the events. No doubt most of the SBS viewers would also have felt that if Samphan and Son Sen were lynched then they were only getting their 'just deserts'. In the heat of the moment obviously the total derailing of the peace process was a secondary consideration by these Australian journalists.¹⁰¹

In the same vein, Lindsay Murdoch, reported on the incident, from Singapore, for *The Age* on the following day under the heading "Khmer leaders attacked on return".¹⁰² He stated, "... Demonstrations against the return of the Khmer Rouge began yesterday. Several thousands of students marched through the city demanding the Khmer Rouge be evicted." He also claimed, "At Phnom Penh airport thousands of people screamed "Killer!" and "Traitor!" as the Khmer Rouge leaders arrived from Bangkok." And after the compound was ransacked, "The Cambodian Prime Minister, Mr Hun Sen, went to the house shortly after Mr Khieu Samphan arrived to try to calm the mob and save the Khmer Rouge leaders, who were trapped ..."

Sue Downie reporting on Radio Australia the day after the attack threw a different light on the event. She stated there was a lot of talk around the Phnom Penh amongst Khmers that strongly suggested Hun Sen bore responsibility for initiating the protest. She emphasized the danger of the entire peace process being derailed. This view was backed up by a well researched article in *The New Yorker* by Stan Sessor.¹⁰³ Sessor began by noting the dominant media images,

... Foreign press photographers sent around the world two unforgettable pictures: Khieu Samphan, a frightened white haired man of sixty, with blood streaming down his face ... then wearing a helmet ... ending up in an armoured personnel carrier of the Cambodian Army, and were taken to the airport and put on a plane to Bangkok. They returned to Phnom Penh a few weeks later, this time carefully guarded by troops of the Hun Sen government. Many publications wrote about the incident as a case of an enraged population that couldn't bear to see its former torturers return.

Two days later *The Sydney Morning Herald* appeared with the editorial heading "Samphan ran out of town again", which argued, "... No-one is suggesting Wednesday's frenzied attempt to extract revenge on Mr. Samphan was planned. But it could have been more carefully guarded against."¹⁰⁴ The same day *The Adelaide Advertiser* ran an AFP wire report under the heading "Hun Sen regrets attack".¹⁰⁵ In this report Hun Sen accepted "full responsibility" but claimed his "personal intervention" had rescued Samphan. Further, Hun Sen was reported as saying "the mob were enraged by memories of the Khmer Rouge killing of more than one million people during their rule". Hun Sen also "denied reports that his government had organised the protests or that it had sent agents to provoke the violence."

Sessor, like Downie, was dubious as to Hun Sen's innocence as to the origin of the protest. He suggested the international press were sucked in. He gave the example of a *Washington Post* editorial, which, following the line of the Australian press, argued, "... Forgetting the past means forgetting the people who were murdered. That is precisely what the Cambodian people are unable, and to their credit, unwilling to do". Sessor notes that the Hun Sen government sought to reinforce this impression. A Foreign Ministry official attempted to explain it this way to him. Sessor conceded the Khmer Rouge were partially to blame by not sending in fresh faces to represent themselves. Nevertheless, he concluded, "While Cambodians had every justification for rising up in anger and attacking the Khmer Rouge compound, the fact is that nothing in Cambodia happens spontaneously."¹⁰⁶

(d) UNTAC and Continued Fighting in 1992

Reporting Cambodia (in early 1992) mainly centred on two issues - the ongoing fighting between the Khmer factions and the decision to commit 500 Australian soldiers for the UNTAC Mission. Press enthusiasm for the use of Australian troops in a peace-keeping capacity in Cambodia remained high. The *Daily Telegraph Mirror* ran the human interest line with "Women for War Zone" and announced twenty women would be among the 500 strong peace keeping force from Australia. Prime Minister Keating, was quoted in the same article saying, "... The soldiers will not be used to enforce or impose peace in Cambodia. If we conclude there is no longer a peace in Cambodia the Australian and other UN forces will have to be withdrawn."¹⁰⁷

By March 1992, *The Age* foreign editor Mark Baker was more dubious. In an article about the continuing arms build-up by the big powers in South East Asia he referred somewhat cynically to the "ostensible outbreak of peace in Cambodia".¹⁰⁸ Perhaps he had been reading the regional press where Thailand's leading paper the *Bangkok Post* reported, "UN officers allege Vietnam units still in Cambodia" and anonymous "senior UN military officer" said "elite Vietnamese units are still operating in Cambodia". UN sources estimate "hundreds" disguised as Cambodian soldiers while the KR allege "thousands"... even non-KR Khmers remain "deeply suspicious of Vietnam's claim that it has withdrawn all its forces". Khieu Samphan said last month "fighting would continue until UN forces disarmed all the factions and verified the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops".¹⁰⁹

In a series of articles for *The Australian* in April-May 1992, James Pringle covered the logistics of UNTAC and the visit of United Nations Secretary General (21 April 1992), positioning of Indonesian troops in Kompong Thom (27 April 1992) and the first Sissophon to Phnom Penh train journey since the Peace Plan (23 May 1992). In the latter article he noted, "in their propaganda broadcasts, the communist Khmer Rouge say there are still Vietnamese troops in Cambodia, although they pleaded they were out in 1989." In a wire service report the same day¹¹⁰ General Sanderson reported delays in implementing the peace program "including verification of the Cambodian ceasefire and the demobilisation and cantonment of forces". No mention of verification of the Vietnamese withdrawal issue was made.¹¹¹

e) The Australian Parliamentary Debate Endorsement of the Full UNTAC Commitment (April 1992)

In late March 1992 the press offered some scepticism over the pending decision to commit the bulk of Australia's forces to the UNTAC group. The issue was fanned in the media by statements by various Liberal opposition spokespeople questioning the government's alleged secrecy over the decision and the fact that the peace agreement seemed to be coming unstuck on the ground.¹¹² The latter view was supported by various reports emanating from Cambodia itself of continued fighting between the Khmer factions.¹¹³

The *Sydney Morning Herald* editorial "Before our troops go to Cambodia", maintained Australia was about to commit 500 troops to Cambodia as the peace plan was "in serious danger of coming unstuck". Blaming the Khmer Rouge for wounding Australia's Colonel Stuart in a helicopter attack, the *Herald* argued responsibility for the ceasefire breakdown was more evenly distributed as "warring factions" had a "patchy" record in observing the ceasefire. In Kompong Thom, the fighting was between "Khmer Rouge guerillas and government troops". The paper warned against "an open-ended involvement", concluding it was "a bit too late to be backing out, but not too late to vent anxieties".¹¹⁴

Under the heading "Killing fields give no peace of mind" *The Australian* backed up this fear of an open-ended commitment. The special Parliamentary debate would have to provide answers to "some awkward questions about the nature of the role the Australians will serve, and the dangers they will face", as the Khmer Rouge remained a "malevolent force, recalcitrant to the last and having lost none of its talent for pure old fashioned thuggery". It was concerned on how our forces would change from peacekeepers to peace enforcers if the Khmer Rouge "turns feral with the peace process in mid-stream". The paper endorsed the flexible line adopted by the ALP, conceding, "the structure of unilateral forces are still evolving", the UN operates in a "nebulous" zone between "peace settlement negotiation and military enforcement" as, UN peacekeeping, by its nature, occurs in an "ad hoc manner."¹¹⁵

The *Canberra Times* was somewhat neutral with "Australia sends 500 to Cambodia".¹¹⁶ The *Financial Review* stressed troop security with "Keating pledges troops' safety".¹¹⁷ *The Age* took a dimmer view "Peace in Cambodia may yet bring battle at home", noting "Australia's diplomatic successes in Cambodia have not translated well on the domestic front."¹¹⁸ The *Sydney Morning Herald's*

“On into the killing fields”, argued if the Liberal Opposition’s “carping” prior to the April 1, statement was “opportunism” as the ALP was alleging, then the ALP Government was in turn guilty of having had prior to this date “too casual an approach to details of our commitment”. The *Herald*, reminded the ALP Government had stressed troops were “peace-keepers and not peace-enforcers”, a distinction “much more reasonable here than in the killing fields themselves.” Keating stressed Australian troops were not going to Cambodia “to impose a settlement” and we will withdraw them “if civil war breaks out again”. The paper noted that if the “going gets tough” then “bipartisan political support for this commitment will be crucial”.¹¹⁹

The Australian editorial on 3 April, “Treading warily in Cambodia”, warned “Were peacekeepers in Cambodia to become embroiled in combat, not only would the intervention fail but the UN would be weakened in its resolve.”¹²⁰ Frank Devine’s column in the ‘op-ed’ pages of *The Australian* argued, “why send word ahead that our soldiers, if threatened, would not fight? To deprive soldiers of bellicosity is to endanger them. To announce in advance that their response to being attacked will be withdrawal, is to invite attack upon them.”¹²¹ But Devine stops short of openly advocating a full frontal attack on the Khmer Rouge. He suggests that issue will be determined by resolution of the much vaunted issue of “how deeply we really wish to be involved in Asia. Ankle-deep? Knee-deep? Deeper?” He restates this more formally with “Canberra’s apparent hedging of our Cambodia commitments is an indication of how wrenching it is to step from cosy contemplation of enhanced trade into confrontation with some of our visceral attitudes to Asia”.¹²²

As the Khmer Rouge stalled, for various reasons, on accepting the UNTAC implementation of the Paris Agreement on a troop cantonment, the ferocity of the anti-Khmer Rouge propaganda reached a new height in Australia. Former Liberal and Democrat politician Don Chipp, who was sponsored on a trip to Vietnam and Cambodia in early April on behalf of the NGOs with the aim of increasing Australia’s aid donations to Indochina, argued in his column in the *Sydney Sunday Telegraph*, written before his departure, and headed “Pol Pot continues with the slaughter”. Chipp took the moral high ground. He argued that foreign policy was about “national interest and self-preservation” whose legacy was endless “agony and suffering” because, whenever applied, results in “ends justifies the means” selfishness, which in turn leads to some countries, (Australia), with a normally high “level of national morality”, allying themselves “to contemptible forces to protect their own interests temporarily”.

This introduction was Chipp's lead up to his deploring, "the sponsorship and protection given to one of the most revolting creatures ever to disgrace this planet - Pol Pot, the imbecilic leader of the Communist Khmer Rouge in Cambodia." Simplifying history, Chipp then apportioned blame for the Third Indochina War. He argued Pol Pot was "supported in turn by the Chinese, the US, Australia and the Thais." After he (Pol Pot) "tortured, maimed and killed between one and three million of his own people he fled from the liberating Vietnamese army in 1979, he has been given sanctuary by corrupt generals of Thailand ... (where) he is still killing and maiming innocent villagers ...".¹²³

(f) The Press and Peacekeeping in the New World Order?

After the Parliamentary debate coverage the media temporarily dropped the issue of Cambodia except for some casual coverage of the positive side of Australian peace keeping in Cambodia, the dangers of facing further flare ups, the dangers and slowness of the mine demobilisation programs, the upsurge of internal refugees from the renewed intensity of the fighting and the failure of the promised UN development aid to arrive from donor countries.¹²⁴

However, the press were also laying the ideological groundwork for the seemingly inevitable contingency that the UNTAC peacekeepers may have to change into peace-enforcers at some future date. For backing up the Devine and Chipp viewpoints was the more sophisticated argument of defence and strategic specialist Gary Klintworth in *The Australian* in June 1992.¹²⁵ Klintworth began with, "Human misery in Bosnia-Herzegovina has made the previously unthinkable quite thinkable: the idea that States can intervene, and may have a right to do so, in the domestic affairs of other states, even to using military force when the objective is clearly humanitarian. This shift in favour of a "right to intervene" ranks among the most important consequences of the post-Cold War attempt to establish a new world order."

Klintworth then reflected on how the New World Order would affect the Cambodian situation with, "The dilemma for the UN and the international community in reconciling realpolitik, humanitarian priorities and the importance of the principle of non-use of force, are reflected in the Cambodian peace settlement. The UN has sent personnel to Cambodia to keep the peace and to prevent a "return to the universally condemned policies and practices of the recent past" - a euphemism for the killings in Cambodia under Poi Pot. Yet the

West and China have guaranteed the Khmer Rouge's inclusion in the Cambodian political process because to exclude them would be to condone the Vietnamese overthrow of the Khmer Rouge regime."¹²⁶

Klintworth concluded, "...While the UN could take no practical action in Cambodia in 1978-79, it may be less unwilling to act in the future for two reasons: the growing acceptance that sometimes there is an obligation on the UN to intervene, and the commitment of Security Council prestige to achieving a lasting peace in Cambodia. In the new world order, UN intervention on humanitarian grounds would be acceptable to most States, if it were seen to be impartial, consistent, transparent, and limited in its objectives."¹²⁷

(g) The "13 June 1992" Cantonment Deadline and the Renewed Targeting of the Khmer Rouge by the Media

The thirteenth of June had been the date settled on for the cantonment of 70 per cent of soldiers of the four Khmer factions, (Phase Two), under UNTAC supervision. As the date approached, it was obvious that the Khmer Rouge was unwilling to comply. The press response in Australia was savage. The *Sydney Morning Herald* 12 June editorial "Cold comfort in Cambodia" looked sceptically on Senator Evans' assurances that the Khmer Rouge were engaged only in "brinkmanship" in refusing to demobilize its army. The paper claimed the Khmer Rouge had "regularly violated the ceasefire since a peace plan was signed by Cambodia's warring factions last October." The paper cited the KR's refusal to allow the Head of UNTAC, Mr Yasushi Akashi, entry into territory they control in Western Cambodia the previous fortnight and their rejection, at the emergency UNTAC/Khmer faction meeting, of "all appeals to join the demobilisation process".¹²⁸

The *Herald* dismissed as 'red herrings' the specific Khmer Rouge demands concerning UNTAC verification of the withdrawal of all Vietnamese troops and their insistence of the elevation of the SNC to a "de facto government with legislative and executive powers" in place of the Hun Sen administration. The paper argued, "... UN observers are satisfied there is no significant Vietnamese troop presence in Cambodia and common sense suggest Hanoi has nothing to gain by concealing one. But the Herald in its editorial does not identify which UN officials were 'satisfied' as to the total Vietnamese troop withdrawal or whether 'satisfied' is the same thing as confirmed."¹²⁹

On the second point, the *Herald* argued,

... As to the SNC, it was established to represent Cambodia externally and to advise UNTAC. But the everyday running of Cambodia was to be left to UNTAC until a freely elected government comes into power next year. To demand changes to that arrangement now means scuttling the October peace accords and going back to the drawing board.

But here the paper ignores that “everyday running of Cambodia” was still in the hands of the Hun Sen faction and not UNTAC. UNTAC had failed to take up their complete responsibilities because of Hun Sen’s refusal to hand over power of the key ministries. If anything, it was UNTAC that shared the blame as it was ‘scuttling’ a key plank of the peace plan by abrogating its administrative responsibilities.¹³⁰

The *Herald* then foreshadowed the new direction of UNTAC by quoting UNTAC Military leader General John Sanderson saying, “the UN peacekeepers have no mandate to enforce the peace plan. They do have a responsibility to protect factions which comply with the plan.” The editorial concluded that even if Evans was right on the “brinkmanship” issue, the Khmer Rouge actions and its protests “at this late stage”¹³¹ raised a serious question about whether it (the KR) “can be trusted to honour the result of elections it is almost certain to lose next year”. Then the paper described Keating’s April statement to pull Australian troops out if it was judged that the situation was “beyond redemption” as “good sense”. It concluded, “Ultimately, only the Cambodians themselves can make peace. If, in the end, the Khmer Rouge chooses to do otherwise, we will need to look for a new approach entirely to that challenge.” But the paper did not elaborate on what this new approach would be.¹³²

The Australian editorial on 15 June, “Disarming the Khmer Rouge”¹³³ took a similar line. It chastised the “intransigence” of the Khmer Rouge for its “totally unreasonable demands”, which were a “frightening reminder of that organisation’s record”, as there was “no evidence that there are Vietnamese forces in the country, certainly not in such strengths as to hinder UNTAC or to strengthen the position of Hun Sen’s government.” Again the proof of this was not verification but simply the political assertion that Vietnam would not want to “alienate all those countries now giving it the aid it so urgently needs”. As to the demand for “plenary powers to the SNC” this was probably because “the Khmer Rouge estimates that it will fail to win the foreshadowed elections”. Writing well

before the KR had withdrawn from the election process, *The Australian* predicted that once the ejection of a democratic government occurs next year then the onus is still on nations such as Australia to be 'vigilant' and "offer the Cambodian people our help to prevent the Khmer Rouge from returning to power."¹³⁴

(h) September 1992 -The Keating Visit to Phnom Penh

Press coverage of the Keating visit stressed its morale boosting role for Australian troops and the flagging optimism of the whole UNTAC operation in the light of the KR failing to meet the June 1992 deadline for disarmament. His visit was overshadowed by his Japan visit that immediately proceeded it. The 'whistle-stop' one-day visit to Phnom Penh, the first by a residing Western Head of State, was perceived domestically in the Australian media as part of his build-up to the Australian Federal elections. It was also read as an attempt to dissipate fears that Australia was getting cold feet over Cambodia's peace plan.

The *Sydney Morning Herald/Age Goodweekend*, anticipating the Keating visit, ran a story coinciding with the Keating visit by *Sydney Morning Herald* foreign affairs correspondent, Tony Wright, "Pall over Phnom Penh, Cambodia's new found peace is marred by poverty".¹³⁵ Wright concluded this report by praising Australia's role in the peace process and saying that it will improve our image in Asia even if our involvement is seen as "a finely balanced process between compassion for a tortured people and pragmatic benefits for Australia". As for the condition of Phnom Penh, Wright argued, "Even if it has brought with it the ugly aspects of a real estate speculation boom amid poverty, and even if it forces Australian officials to carry bags of cash across borders it is better to light one small candle than to curse the darkness". The context of this comment was his observation that an Australian foreign affairs official had carried \$600,000 in US banknotes to purchase a new Embassy for Australia in Phnom Penh. A building, we were told, that had already increased in value to \$2.7 million in just a few months.

This article was typical of the roving Western correspondent for its short-sightedness; if only because Wright did not link the appalling poverty of the average Cambodian peasant with the real estate speculation and other corruption tolerated by the authorities in Phnom Penh. He comforted his reader by the apparent gloating over the Australian Government's speculative windfall and by saying the cash for the Australian Embassy purchase was "carefully audited at

both ends of the journey". The issue of what happened to it after it was handed over to the Hun Sen administration remained unexplained.¹³⁶

The same night as the Keating visit to Phnom Penh in September 1992 hit the evening news programs in Australia both *Foreign Correspondent* (ABCTV) and *Dateline* (SBS-TV) current affairs programmes¹³⁷ screened similar items on Khmer Rouge business links with Thailand. Underlying this theme was the floated option of imposing an economic boycott on the Khmer Rouge if they refuse to disarm. Thus these programs served as almost a 'feasibility study' for an Evans initiative to move for economic sanctions against the Khmer Rouge should they fail to submit to disarmament before the UNTAC supervised elections in May 1993.

Peter George's reporting for *Foreign Correspondent* was the more strident of the two presentations. He described Pailin, (the Khmer Rouge's 'de facto' provincial capital), as nothing more than a few dirt tracks with an obviously poverty stricken population of about 25,000. The suggestion was the money from timber and gems did not benefit the people here. True. But George did not raise the issue of how the people in Pailin fared when compared to the rest of the country. Nor did he state the obvious - that these rural peasants were in receipt of none of the UN humanitarian aid lavished on Phnom Penh and other parts of the country under programs controlled by the other SNC factions.

George suggested that he had convinced the Khmer Rouge into letting him ride in a jeep into Pailin under their escort. He tells the viewer he has been warned by the soldiers not to film the gem mining areas that dot the road into town. He 'secretly' films but the Khmer Rouge escorts take no retaliatory action. No mention is made by George that he was part of an extensive Bangkok media contingent that had their visit to Pailin pre-arranged in advance by agreement between UNTAC and the NADK.¹³⁸ The purpose of this journey is to witness the arrival of UNTAC's civilian head, Mr Atashi in Pailin. The television viewer is left thinking the report must be giving the truth because of the danger the journalist went through to obtain it.

The *Dateline* reporter was not so adventurous. Yet, her theme was the same as *Foreign Correspondent* - to link the Khmer Rouge's control over gems mining and timber logging trade with Thailand as a financial source of its arms purchases. The argument was that if an economic embargo was imposed on this trade it could prevent the Khmer Rouge undermining the peace process. The

logic here seems to be that a blockade of Khmer Rouge capitalism will stop them mounting a communist takeover at some later date.

But there were other contradictions. The *Dateline* report revealed the Hun Sen regime actually exported more of Cambodia's timber stock over the Eastern side of Cambodia into Vietnam. Whether this income was also used for arms purchases was not disclosed. As one of the Khmer Rouge primary reasons for refusing the UNTAC mandate remained Vietnam's economic and demographic encroachment onto Khmer sovereignty it begs the question as to why there was no attempt by either current affairs program to examine the Cambodian-Vietnamese border? A thorough monitoring of the Australian media for the 12 month period up to February 1993 revealed only one brief mention of UNTAC's inadequate supervision of the Vietnamese movements through the Eastern Cambodian border.¹³⁹

(i) How Australia's Domestic Immigration Policy Unhinged the Foreign Policy Line on Cambodia

In October 1991 the international media generated much speculation that the Khmer Rouge would forcibly repatriate refugees under their control in the Thai camps back over the border. The issue featured strongly in the international news sections of *The Australian*.¹⁴⁰ By March 1992 the emphasis switched to reports from CARE Australia executives over the growing difficulties of the logistics of the UN repatriation operation. The *Herald Sun* carried "Farce warning on refugees' return" while a *Sydney Morning Herald* editorial¹⁴¹ warned continuing fighting inside Cambodia may produce "a stampede in the other direction". The *West Australian* had "Foreign aid delays slow refugee work", complete with a photo of former Prime Minister Fraser as CARE Director touring resettlement sites at Battambang.¹⁴² A *Newsweek* feature, "The perilous road home", had Ron Moreau in Sisophon where "UN peacekeepers face their biggest challenge ever: repatriating thousands of Cambodian refugees - and keeping the Khmer Rouge at bay".¹⁴³

But concern with the civil liberties of the repatriated refugees from the Thai camps, or for that matter those facing repatriation from Hong Kong to Vietnam, became overshadowed in the Australian media in the wake of the arrival of a new influx of Cambodian 'boat people' on Australia's Northern shores. These new arrivals, augmented by Chinese 'boat people' arriving as 'economic refugees' off the West Australian coast near Port Hedland, became a major media event. The

arrivals coincided with an upsurge of domestic concern in Australia over continued immigration at a time of high unemployment.

A sample of the press will demonstrate this new found concern. The *Sydney Morning Herald* editorial on immigration in late January 1992¹⁴⁴ noted that immigration Minister Hand distanced himself from PM Keating's claim that the Liberal opposition's policy had racist overtones. The editorial called for an informed debate on the issue of immigration. It generally supported moves by the government to end the "unintended imbalance" caused by the "humanitarian assistance program", exacerbated by the new boat people arrivals. It called also for the government to dispel the myth that we were "being swamped by Asian immigration and the false alarm about a dramatic increase in the number of boat people heading for our northern shores". In the same breath, the editorial demanded a new immigration/refugee intake balance that was more closely geared to labour market requirements.¹⁴⁵ In February *The Herald*¹⁴⁶ editorial "The refugees and the rorter" supported the Government's decision to 'streamline' the assessment process over refugee status. It said Minister Hand's reference to 'rorters' using legal delaying tactics to postpone or alter their repatriation after failing the refugee test was 'tough talk'. However the paper advocated 'flexibility' in enforcement to avoid miscarriages of justice. Then in early April 1992 the popular tabloid *Daily Telegraph Mirror*¹⁴⁷ blew up a Keating interview on the SBSTV program *Dateline* the previous evening where he forecast a cut in immigration for the coming year. Keating refused to be drawn on whether the thirty eight Cambodian boat people who were refused refugee status should be allowed to remain in Australia on humanitarian grounds because the matter was before the courts.

Four days later a page three report "Cambodians escape custody" in the same paper threw fuel on the fire. Four of the rejected Cambodian detainees carried out a desperate escape from a Sydney detention centre. Under pressure the government was reported as backing down by admitting a 'defect' in the screening process.¹⁴⁸ Telegraph cartoonist Warren's cartoon the same day pictured a refugee looking down an open drain with the sign 'hope' indicating his way out.¹⁴⁹ The implication was the Federal Government had bungled and was insensitive. In mid-April, *The Australian's* editorial "Our inept refugee program"¹⁵⁰ concluded that the government's new restriction were justified but the "erratic feature of the present system" meant we may as well let the 400 boat people stay.

A letter in the *Sydney Morning Herald*¹⁵¹ argued, “(that) returning refugees will not be killed by Cambodian authorities, although they may be killed in a civil war or by the Khmer Rouge.” This highlighted the Government’s dilemma of arguing the peace process in Cambodia was working and it was safe for the Cambodians to return home. By May the government was really on the back foot¹⁵² and was depicted by the media as insensitive after rushing through changes to the Immigration Act, with Opposition support, to “derail” the appeal to the Federal Court by boat people. Mr Hand defended the action (specifically aimed at the boat people) by saying they arrived in Australia “illegally” and was aimed at heading off those trying to by-pass the system through legal appeals.

The Sydney tabloid *Daily Telegraph Mirror*¹⁵³ banner page one headline “Hand gets tough, boat people warned as more arrive” where those on board the Chinese sampan arriving in Darwin, could be “thrown out of the country within weeks”. We were told their arrival was the tenth since 1989. The Warren cartoon the same day had a stern-faced Hand ordering the boat people back into the water. The op-ed column by Sue Williams was less convinced and added sarcastically,

*They fled a country soaked in the blood of more than a million citizens cut down by the Khmer Rouge. But naturally, uppermost in their minds was the chance of a nice little mansion in Point Piper ... Last week, continued fighting in Cambodia left seven soldiers dead, and 22 more injured in the worst violations of the UN sponsored ceasefire so far. If it gets any worse, we may well pull out our troops. If this ragged little group of desperate people are pushed screaming and sobbing into the next plane, it will forever shame any reputation we have left for fairness, justice and compassion.*¹⁵⁴

Clearly, the government’s need to tighten up on immigration ran counter to its foreign policy line of arguing that the Cambodian peace process was on track (and the returnees had nothing to fear in going back to Cambodia). The ‘Chinese student’ option - a temporary moratorium - had been cut-off by the political perception that Hawke had made a mistake in his 1989 emotional decision.

The media remained divided. The counter-view advocating realpolitik on sovereignty and immigration was advanced by P.P. McGuiness with his article “We must not surrender to boat people blackmail”.¹⁵⁵ In the *Sydney Sunday Telegraph* the influential commentator John Laws, weighed in and warned that immigration was not about Australia “providing a giant soup kitchen in the

Southern Hemisphere” and accused the Federal Government of not having an immigration policy.¹⁵⁶ By June the issue came to a head with a David Jenkins investigative feature in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, “Destination Darwin”, with a huge map showing the conspiratorial route of Chinese boat people into Australia. “The latest wave of boat people sees a risky path and a better life; Australia sees a refugee racket and a growing threat, writes David Jenkins”.¹⁵⁷

In mid-June Mr Justice Einfield addressed the National Press Club on behalf of National Refugee Week. His widely reported criticism of the government’s handling of the boat people crisis had a softening impact on the media line. The *Sydney Morning Herald*¹⁵⁸ referred to the Einfield ‘broadside’. The paper criticised Einfield’s argument about the privileged position of Chinese students when Cambodian boat people face a more desperate situation. Chinese students benefited by a “one off Prime Ministerial intervention in usual procedures”, an “exception”, a ‘quirk of history’.

Paradoxically, this exception alarmed “many people” and led to the current hard-line, thus making it more difficult for the Cambodian boat people. The paper argued, “Australia cannot afford to send a signal to potential illegal immigrants - by lenient treatment of Cambodian boat people”. Yet our immigration policy should be “a balance” between “sentiment alone” and “ruthless efficiency of bureaucracy”. More importantly, the paper concluded that immigration “... involves broader foreign policy considerations, including to begin with, what action we can take to preventing repressive regimes (causing people) to flee their homes.”

The editorial broadly reflected an emerging media and community consensus as politicians ducked for cover and generally sought to shift media attention to other issues. Keating and Evans let the Immigration Minister carry the can and they concentrated on promoting the “positive” aspects of our ‘push to Asia’. The issue became buried amid claim and counter-claim involving Hand’s portfolio, the courts, lawyers and bureaucrats.¹⁵⁹ Foreign Minister Evans ran cold on the issue lest it impact on the unravelling shortcomings of his Cambodian peace plan. By the time the Federal elections arrived in early 1993 Keating could proudly announce to the media figures which showed a massive drop in immigration levels without a whimper being raised about the status of the detained Cambodian boat people.

(j) The Australian Media on Cambodia in the 1993 Lead-up to the May Elections

Coverage of Cambodia in the Australian media during 1993 has been sporadic. The decision by the UN Security Council to proceed with the elections without the participation of the Khmer Rouge brought the diplomatic aspects of the Paris agreement back into focus in January. There was much media speculation about whether UNTAC had been a failure and whether the UN Security Council had the mandate to change the UNTAC brief from peace keepers to peace enforcers. Attention was drawn to the general break down of law and order and the decision to send an Australian judge to Cambodia as part of an enhanced judicial/law enforcement role to be adopted by UNTAC.

Most media attention was directed towards demonstrating the positive role of the Australian contingent of UNTAC force. To this end the Melbourne *Herald Sun* has run a regular column penned by one of the officer serving in Cambodia. In March, a week long series of reports from Sally Neighbour was run on ABC News and ATV News covering such issues as a profile on Australian Khmer refugees who returned to help with reconstruction and running the election, the problems of resettlement for the returnees from the Thai border camps and Australian soldiers running English speaking courses in their spare time.

Other issues featured in the media include the capture, hostage taking, and subsequent release, of both military and civilian UNTAC personnel after they had crossed into Khmer Rouge controlled areas. Political assassinations of electoral workers was another issue. Here the evidence pointed towards agents of the Hun Sen administration. However, the Khmer Rouge were accused of responsibility by the Hun Sen faction. The Australian media left the issue of blame unresolved but, more often than not, suggested Khmer Rouge culpability.

A similar pattern emerged with the random massacres of groups of Vietnamese civilians. While both the Khmer Rouge and KPNLF had been expressing public dissatisfaction with the UNTAC's inability to contain the flow of new settlers from Vietnam into Cambodia, the massacres were almost universally blamed on the Khmer Rouge faction. However official Khmer Rouge denials were carried in the various reports.

On the ABC's *Report From Asia* in March, Indochina correspondent Evan Williams reported from Phnom Penh on the issue of "ethnic violence". He

interviewed the UNHCR Director Denis McNamara who expressed concern at the attacks on Vietnamese settlers. He argued "the nature of UNTAC had changed because of the failure of cantonment." He argued the UN Security Council had reiterated the mandate included "protective security" of those participating in the electoral process. UNTAC was empowered to launch special prosecutions to act as a clear deterrent to ethnic violence, but without "superseding the local authorities".¹⁶⁰

All this demonstrates that the attempts to impose the electoral solution on Cambodia in 1993, without first resolving the basic grievances of the Khmer factions - sovereignty, power sharing arrangements, confirmation of the Vietnamese withdrawal - was a fundamental flaw in the UN bartered peace. It was a flaw in which much of the Western media share responsibility. Had they done their homework better in the lead up to the May 1993 elections then the inevitable debacle may have been avoided, or at least minimised.

Part of the explanation for this shortcoming relates to what media analyst and academic Rod Tiffen pointed out in his 1978 book on "newsmaking" in Southeast Asia,

*... News values, assumptions about audience interests and attitudes, the production and format demands of news organisations, the differing priority and authority accorded to different news sources, all constitute a very considerable and limiting prism through which Southeast Asian news is filtered to Australia.*¹⁶¹

The news on Cambodia is filtered in a number of ways at present. Firstly, by what Australian foreign correspondents inside Cambodia regard as newsworthy. This can often be influenced by their sources. Secondly, it is filtered by the fact that there are still only a very small number of journalists who are regularly reporting on Cambodia. In Australia only a mere handful of reporters cover foreign affairs. The quality of their work is mixed with regionally based reports not always superior in quality to Australian sourced material. Thirdly, it is filtered by the continued dominance over the media of large institutions who forever constrict what can be legitimately reported - either because of commercial or political reasons.

In developing an 'Asianist' or 'Cambodianist' perspective, Australian journalists should be wary making any concessions, or engaging in self-censorship, or

offering succour, to those reactionary regional leaders of whatever political persuasion who suppress their own people and then hide behind the slogan of "We do it differently in Asia". But journalists should also remember the the Cambodian state as such, is a weak and divided one. It is much easier to write criticism of Cambodian political leaders than it is of Indonesian, Malaysian or even Fijian leaders. If our aim is national reconciliation and an internal, rather than external solution to Cambodia, then we should write accordingly.

Notes

1. Search conducted for this paper by the author. Colombo Plan aid and Sihanouk Royalty news were the most frequently mentioned.
2. See Hayes, "A Radiant Way" *Sun-Herald*, 23 May 1992, p.44. See also Drabble's interview with Phillip Adams on the ABC's *Late Night Live* during her 1992 tour. An earlier variant of Cambodia as a literary space for resolving 'Western Conscience' was Spalding Grey's *Swimming to Cambodia* book and tour of Australia in 1986. An article that spans both 'Heroic Journalism' and 'Western Conscience' approach is Frank Palmos's thriller fiction, 'Lucy', in *Harper's Bazaar*, Spring, 1989, pp.198-201, 230.
3. One of the most recent examples was the television report from Kathleen Reen (Channel 7 Melbourne 11 AM program 12 March 1993) on the Australian Electoral Commission officers working on voter enrolments in Cambodia. The opening visual sequence was archival footage of Khmer soldiers approaching a bas relief of Angkor stone followed by camera close up of a row of skulls. The commentary which accompanied these shots was "Cambodia, the very name conjures up images of war and famine."
4. M. Williams, *The Land in Between: The Cambodia Dilemma*. 1969, p.13.
5. Noam Chomsky cites the works of Barron & Paul and Ponchaud (see below) as the seminal texts here. Micheal Vickery and others referred to this as the "Standard Total View" of postwar Cambodia (1975-78).
6. In a review of the book, *Cambodia Watching Down Under* (hereinafter as CWDU), as one of the key players in this 'revisionist' school Micheal Vickery denied that such influence existed. He argued writers such as himself (between 1980-88) were only able to get "one or two articles apiece in a major media organ, while the anti-Vietnam, and therefore anti-Phnom Penh side, usually right-wing extremists, had regular columnists in the major newspapers." (*Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 23, 2 [1992] 439). Vickery seems to ignore a major tenet of *Cambodia Watching*, viz. there was 'elite ambivalence' in the Australian media. Most of the "right-wing extreme" columnists were gathered under the Murdoch roof and were

generally discredited on Indochina in the post-'75 environment. The more influential foreign policy reporting was found in the Fairfax papers of *The Age*, the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Canberra Times* where commentary on Indochina indeed took on a more "pro-Phnom Penh" flavour throughout the 1980s. One has to look no further than Vickery's own 1988 contribution to the *Canberra Times*. This paper could not even find space for a brief letter in reply from the leading Sihanoukist in Australia, Bun Sream Theam, Head of the Cambodian Information Office. Such editorial censorship of the genuine Khmer voice in Australia was routine in all three Fairfax papers. By 1991 another Sihanouk aide de camp, Julio Jeldres, felt sufficient evidence had mounted against *The Age* to launch a formal complaint with the Australian Press Council. In what appeared to be a crude closing of ranks the APC sided with *The Age* and aborted the Jeldres case.

7. For space reasons I have omitted, discussion of the contribution of Richard Hughes. See *Barefoot Reporter*, Mike MacLachlan (ed.), FEER Ltd., Hong Kong, 1984.
8. B. Kiernan, *op. cit.*, p.254
9. B. Kiernan *op. cit.*, p.254. Maslyn Williams, *The Land in Between*, Collins, 1969, lists in his bibliography a number of books that followed soon after including D.J. Steiberg, *Cambodia -Its People Its Society and Its Culture*, H.R.A.F., Yale University, New Haven, 1959, which Williams describes as "though perhaps statistically out-of-date, covers almost every aspect of Cambodian life." (at p.255)
10. B Kiernan (ed)., *Burchett: Reporting the Otherside of the World 1939-83*, chapter 11, B. Kiernan; "Put Not Thy Trust in Princes: Burchett on Kampuchea", pp.252-269. *The Times Literary Supplement* (19 December 1986, p.1419) review of this book by Jonathan Luxmoore argued "...in this collection of essays we are presented with a classic work of historical revisionism, significant not only as a bid for Burchett's personal rehabilitation but also as a putative vindication of the regionalist strains in Australian political culture with which he was identified by his devotees."
11. Kiernan, *ibid.*, pp.254-55

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12. Kiernan, *ibid.*, p.255
 13. Kiernan, *ibid.*, p.258.
 14. Kiernan, *ibid.*, p.259
 15. Warner, *Reporting South-EastAsia*, p.277.
 16. Warner, *ibid.*, p.279.
 17. Warner, *ibid.*, p.279.
 18. Warner, *ibid.*, p.275.
 19. M. Osborne, *Before Kampuchea*, p.76. See CWDU, p.7 for fuller details.
 20. Visnews was then the largest television newsfilm agency in the world. It's main aim was to cover the world "without bias" and provide competition to the American networks. It was London-based with major shareholders including the BBC, ABC, Reuters and in the early days J. Arthur Rank Corporation. (T. Bowden, *One Crowded Hour: Neil Davis Combat Cameraman*, Collins, Sydney, 1987 op. sit. pp.59-60)
 21. T. Bowden, *ibid.*, p.60,64.
 22. T. Bowden, *ibid.*, p.224
 23. *CWDU*, p.8.
 24. *CWDU*, p.42.
 25. T. Bowden, *op. sit.*, p.187-88.
 26. This list is extracted from a longer list supplied by freelance and Visnews cameraman Walter Burgess.
 27. T. Bowden, *op. cit.*, p.233.
 28. T. Bowden, *op. cit.*, p.265.
 29. T. Bowden, *op. cit.*, p.264.

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30. T. Bowden, *op. cit.*, p.236. Bowden recounted examples of military atrocities against Lon Nol soldiers supplied to him in his interviews with Davis as further evidence for Davis's professed fear of capture by the Khmer Rouge.
 31. See T. Bowden in *The Australian* newspaper, July 1985.
 32. Interestingly, unlike Bowden, other retrospectives on the Lon Nol War argue the Vietcong and NVA regulars operating inside Cambodia were responsible for deaths of more journalists than the Khmer Rouge. For example see Robert Anson, *War News: A Young Reporter in Indochina*, New York, 1989.
 33. T. Bowden, *op. cit.*, p.313.
 34. T. Bowden, *op. cit.*, p.316.
 35. *Entitled Manufacturing Consent*, released in Australia in 1992. Distributed by Gil Scrine Films, Haberfield, Sydney. Also screened on SBS-TV January 1993.
 36. *The Age*, April 1975.
 37. The Vietnamese, facing similar allegations of 'bloodbaths', were able to counter the propaganda barrage more effectively because of their more sophisticated links with sympathetic journalists and solidarity groups in the West and the fact that the takeover of Saigon did not involve the massive upheaval that occurred in Phnom Penh. Journalists like Neil Davis were quick to defend the new regime. In chronicling Davis' career here for *One Crowded Hour* Tim Bowden paints a benign view of the liberation of Vietnam and its immediate aftermath. Unlike his description of Cambodia, Bowden argued there were no immediate reprisals against the losing side in Vietnam. (Bowden, p.43).
 38. See Jon Swain, 'The pain of a conquered city' (*The Age*, 12 May 1975) and 'Wasteland of Phnom Penh' (*The Age*, 13 May 1975).
 39. Although the Tarr were heavily involved in defending the early days of the DK regime through the *News From Kampuchea* newsletter and articles in the New Zealand press, they now apparently subscribe to the New Standard
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- Consensus. See C.M. Tarr *The Vietnamese in Cambodia, Race & Class*, No. 2, 1992.
40. See Swain's account of his Cambodia experience in the ABC-TV book *Frontiers* (1989) which is based on the television documentary series of the same name.
 41. T. Bowden, *op. cit.*, p.318.
 42. T. Bowden, *op. cit.*, p.319. Here Davis shot exclusive footage of the final collapse and remained in Vietnam for three and a half months working for Reuters and NBC.
 43. Brian Furlonger, (ed.) *Then and Now: ABC Correspondents Abroad*, ABC, Sydney, 1981, pp.8s-87.
 44. P. Raffaele, *ibid.*, p.86.
 45. P. Raffaele, *op. cit.*, p.85.
 46. P. Raffaele, *op. cit.*, pp.86-87.
 47. B. Furmonger, *op. cit.*, p.9.
 48. P. Raffaele, *op. cit.*, p.87.
 49. p Raffaele, *op. cit.*, pp.86-87.
 50. Raffaele continues further, with the concluding remarks that "some months later" a Japanese photojournalist named Mabuchi "scrambled across the same strip of barb wire" was "beaten up and interrogated" before being brought back to the border and "allowed to climb back into Thailand." But Raffaele does not mention, (nor does Brian Furlonger who edited this narrative six years after the original radio report), that Mabuchi was a supporter of the Khmer Rouge and made numerous border crossings into Democratic Kampuchea between 1975-79 and filed a number of reports supporting the regime in this period.
 51. Personal interview with Walter Burgess, 1992.
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52. P. Raffaele, *op. cit.*, p.87.
 53. P. Raffaele, *op. cit.*, p. 85.
 54. P. Raffaele, *op. cit.*, p.86.
 55. *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 29 October 1976.
 56. Other specialists in the field such as David Chandler in *Pacific Affairs* and Micheal Vickery in *Westerly* mounted academic rebuttals to the worst of the propaganda as they sought to unravel what was really happening inside Kampuchea.
 57. E.S. Herman & N. Chomsky, *The Political Economy of Human Rights* Volume Two, South End Press, Boston, 1979.
 58. Inside the new Democratic Kampuchea between 1975-78 there were few independent or foreign media observers. The Chinese journalist delegation who went to Kampuchea in 1975 were totally in sympathy with the new regime. Apart from Chinese correspondents and film crews there were also solidarity delegations from as diverse backgrounds as the PLO, Fretilin, Scandinavian diplomats and an assortment of US, Canadian and Japanese Leftist political party study tours. The reports from these visits were supportive of the DK regime. They were digested selectively by the key Australian Left intellectuals many of whom publically defended the DK regime against the Western media onslaught during this period.
 59. For further discussion on the press in the DK period see *CDWU*, Institute of Asian Studies, Bangkok, 1991. On reporting from US see William Shawcross "The Third Indochina War", *New York Review of Books*, April 4, 1978 and L. Finley, "The Propaganda War", *Southeast Asian Chronicle* no. 64, Sept-Oct., 1978.
 60. See Denis Phillips' book *The Second Cold War* (1989) as an example of this perspective.
 61. See *CDWU*, p.119 on the response on a more left liberal response from defence and strategic studies academic Coral Bell as published in *The Age*.
 62. G. McCormack, 1979. *Arena*, Melbourne, No. 53, pp. 40-82,

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63. Generally speaking the Murdoch press adopted the 'hardline' US/Fraser position of totally isolating Vietnam economically and diplomatically, whereas the Fairfax newspapers pursued the 'appeasement' line of accepting Vietnam's invasion as a *fait accompli* and proposed Australia should 'wean Hanoi away from the Soviets'. See *CWDU* for elaboration.
 64. See W. Shawcross, *The Quality of Mercy: Cambodia, Holocaust and Modern Conscience*, for a blow by blow discussion.
 65. Rod Tiffen in Alison Broinowski (ed.) *Australia, Asia and the Media*, CSAAR, Griffith Uni., 1982, pp.97-98.
 66. While supporters of the PRK claimed that the rapid economic reconstruction of Cambodia was under-reported in the Australian media, at the same time, journalist reports, such as those of Nate Thayer, Paul Grice and others, filmed inside the 'liberated zones' of Cambodia between 1979-92, found that their rare film footage and reports, supporting the counter viewpoint on the strength of the Resistance, was systematically excluded from exposure by the Australian media.
 67. A good example here was the treatment meted out by the media to Foreign Minister Bill Hayden during his 1985 'Honest Broker' tour of the region. Foreign editor of the Sydney Morning Herald summed it all up by saying "Hayden: A victim of bad timing," D. Jenkins, *Sydney Morning Herald*, March 1985.
 68. Only seasoned hands like Peter Hastings drew the parallel. In one *Sydney Morning Herald* column he backed the PRK solution for Cambodia. Soon after he backed the Indonesian solution for East Timor. In both cases it was a case of "tidying up the map." Hastings in this sense pre-dated the more recent Alitas-Evans alliance on the same issues.
 69. *Cambodia: The Betrayal* (screened in Australia in February 1991 as part of the ABC-TV's True Stories series).
 70. G. Henderson "Secrets of a great Australian windbag", *Sydney Morning Herald*. The Henderson column was merely an overflow from an extensive attack on Pilger documentary mounted in the British press after he was awarded the Richard Dimbleby BAFTA award for journalism in March
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1991. The British *Sunday Observer* (17 March 1991) ran with William Shawcross and "The trouble with John Pilger". Pilger's reply was on 24 March 1991 and then Shawcross reply again on 31 March 1991. The *British Guardian* (6 July 1991) also reported Pilger's lose of the libel case over *Cambodia Year II*, involving a suit from two former SAS soldiers. Pilger's counterclaim against the British government, (more widely reported in Australia), was in the same issue. Pilger letter in his own defence was in the same paper (9 July 1991), as was the testimony of one of Hun Sen's Minister's who was in London to be a witness for Pilger in the court case. Then Gerard Henderson "Signs of a precarious peace for Cambodia", *Sydney Morning Herald* (23 July 1991) began with a side-swipe at Pilger over the SAS defamation case. Pilger responded to this attack "West conceals record of Khmer aid" where "The whole truth of Western duplicity over Cambodia has yet to be told. For the moment, a conspiracy of silence prevails". Pilger then points out the UK government admits using SAS teams to train the "non-communist" resistance up till 1989. Pilger argues these groups are just a front for the Khmer Rouge and that the training was still going on although now "privatised". (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 August 1991, P.13-).

71. CWDU, p.309.

72. CWDU, p.309.

73. Nate Thayer, "Cambodia: Misperceptions and Peace," *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 14, No. 2, Spring 1991, pp.179-91, at p.179.

74. See T. Parkinson, "Not a bad peace of work for a country so divided", *The Australian*, 3 July 1991, p.9, G. Klintworth, "Laying the bones of hatred to rest", *The Australian*, 3 July 1991, p.9, G. Henderson, "Signs of a precarious peace for Cambodia", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 July 1991, p.11.

75. S. Lipski, "Pol stirs the Pot", the *Bulletin*, 20 August 1991, p.76. The cartoon with this article is hysterical. It shows an Asian hotel waiter knocking on the door of room 666 with a food tray loaded up with skulls saying "Room Service for Mr. Pol Pot."

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76. L. Murdoch, *The Age*, 26 August 1991, p.10. Mr Murdoch stated, "Intense investigations have already revealed attempts to book a Mr Pot into several Pattaya hotels in the past couple of days. It is thought they were hoax calls but nobody here, particularly those fooled last time, is underestimating the Khmer Rouge leader's ingenuity." Reds under the bed?
77. L. Murdoch, *The Age*, 26 August 1991, p.10. cf. *Bangkok Post* 3 September 1991 "Hun Sen still at odds with UN over poll system".
78. *Telegraph Mirror* "Peace for Cambodia. 'The war is over - Sihanouk'.
79. Saturday 31 August 1991, the *Sydney Morning Herald* Reuter report "Peace talks end on hopeful note" .
80. Editorial, 'Sowing Peace in the killing fields', *Sydney Morning Herald*, (8 September 1991). A U.S press report on the same meeting, in *The Washington Post*, directly contradicted this line arguing, "The talks hit a snag(with) Phnom Penh amendments ... to bar the Khmer Rouge from participating in eventual elections." (Republished in Australia in *Khmer Smaradey*, 1 September 1991).
81. Editorial, *The Age*, 8 September 1991 p.12.
82. The *Sydney Morning Herald*, (21 September 1991) reprinted a *Los Angeles Times* article, "Factions overcome final hurdle to UN peace deal", as the four Khmer factions grouped in New York for the annual UNGA vote for the first time as the new SNC. This heading did not reflect a cautionary tale of the article's final paragraph: "... But the Security Council, before committing money and prestige, needs guarantees of operational control there which the Cambodians (collectively) are still reluctant to provide."
- This editorial praised Hayden's role before Evans and suggested it was ASEAN that restricted his 'honest broker' role for Australia. Perhaps the constant change in editorial staff meant this paper forgot its own heavy criticisms of Hayden in 1985?
83. Editorial, *The Australian*, 25 September 1991, p.14.
84. *Weekend Australian*, 28-29 October 1991, p.9.
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85. *Weekend Australian*, 28-29 October 1991, p.16.
 86. Laurie Oakes, "Deserving of praise", the *Bulletin*, 22 October 1991, p.28.
 87. Was the Oakes error here, like that of Evans, to assume the Khmer Rouge did not have a resource base of its own independent of international backers?
 88. Bruce Jones, "Australia rescues a nation in turmoil", Extra, *Sun-Herald* (Sydney),
 89. Greg Sheridan "Midwife to a fragile Cambodian peace", *The Australian*, 30 October 1991, p.13.
 90. Hun Sen was widely reported as the "Prime Minister of Cambodia" and not the leader of one of four factions under the SNC. He was given a diplomatic and media profile of a recognised Head of State. Hun Sen addressed a large press conference in Sydney and Melbourne, where he spoke to gatherings of the ex-patriot Khmer community. He also addressed the National Press Club. His message to the Khmer community was conciliatory, inviting them to return home and help rebuild their war-torn country.
 91. The *Sydney Morning Herald* report on 29 October 1991.
 92. See F. Devine (*The Australian*, 6 April 1992) where he reveals that Hun Sen was lent on by Evans to give an undertaking that Australian troops would not be exposed to fighting in Cambodia. An undertaking that Hun Sen revealed he was not in any position to police.
 93. K. Gosman, "Evans earns world's respect", *Sun Herald*, 29 December 1991, p.25. Vickers also notes the early rivalry between Australia and Indonesia over the 'honest broker' role was resolved in Australia's favour by Stephan Solarz exerting US pressure in favor of Evans. A Fretilin representative in Sydney has argued in 1992 to this author that this was also because of an Alitas-Evans trade-off to bury the East Timor issue. This latter aspect is a point that Vickers appears either unaware of, or not inclined to make public.
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94. Editorial "Cambodia's next experiment" *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 November 1991, p.12.
 95. Editorial, 'Cambodia's next experiment', *ibid* 15 November 1991, p.12.
 96. *Good Weekend* supplement 14 December 1991 . Also distributed with *The Age* same day.
 97. L. Murdoch, *The Age & Sydney Morning Herald*, *Good Weekend* Magazine section, 14 December 1991.
 98. L.Murdoch/Cambodia by-line, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 October 1991, p.8, reprinted from *The Age*.
 99. *Weekend Australian*, 26-27 October 1991, p1 6.
 100. However Hun Sen was receiving an international media caning after a profile on him, written by Steve Heder, linking him to the Toul Sleng interrogation centre. This document was widely circulated in the international press at the time by pro-Hun Sen groups. It's circulation was timed to coincide with his return to Phnom Penh.
 101. *Dateline*, 27 November 1991.
 102. *The Age*, 28 November 1991. "Khmer leaders attacked on return",
 103. Stan Sessor, 'Report from Cambodia', *The New Yorker*, 18 May 1992, from p.43 onwards.
 104. *Sydney Morning Herald*, editorial "Samphan ran out of town again", 29 November 1991. Republished in *Smaraday Khmer*, 11 February 1991, p.20.
 105. *Adelaide Advertiser*, 30 November 1991. From Phnom Penh/AFP.
 106. Through interviewing a number of Cambodians involved in the incident, Sessor later discovered that classes at Phnom Penh University were cancelled the day before Samphan arrival and students were handed placards from the Hun Sen Ministry of Interior. His sources allege that the

demonstration the following day was controlled by Khmer and Vietnamese that were not from the university. Sessor argues that an SPK television video clearly showed "complicity by the police and soldiers guarding the house". Thus *The New Yorker*, if it is to be believed, reveals more than a little superficiality in the Australian press version of events.

In December 1991 there were also student protests in Phnom Penh mounted against charges of corruption by Hun Sen officials and ministers. The students alleged there was wide-scale selling off of Cambodian assets with the profits being privately pocketed. During these protests a number of students were killed by the police and army. The Australian press were notably mute about the details of these protests. One freelance journalist, Helen Jarvis, on her return to Australia in early 1992 was interviewed by ABC radio. Jarvis asserted the protests were more than likely instigated by Khmer Rouge "agent provocateurs". This view was strongly contradicted by Sessor's article in *The New Yorker*.

107. *The Daily Telegraph Mirror*, 2 February 1992. "Women for War Zone", pp. 1-2.
108. Mark Baker, "Don't sell your sword shares", *The Age*, 20 March 1992.
109. *Bangkok Post*, from Oddâr Meanchey (AP/Reuters), 9 March 1992. See also *Bangkok Post*, Phnom Penh (UPI/Reuter), "Cambodia warns of food shortages" 9 March 1992, quoting SOC's Hor Nam Hong appeal for aid and KR pledging a continuation of fighting until Vietnam's withdrawal is confirmed.
110. *Weekend Australian*, 2-3 May 1992, p.16.
111. See also *Canberra Times/Mid Week Magazine*, 25 March 1992, "The Liberation of Angkor Wat, Susan Aitkin reports", (feature article).
112. *The Age* ran with "Lib threatens to oppose peace force" (28 March 1992). *The Canberra Times* reported the Government's response as "Opposition 'negative carping' criticised" (31 March 1992).

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113. Reflecting on the reports from Cambodia the *Financial Review* ran David Lague's "UN peacekeeping efforts at standstill in Cambodia" on 31 March. The next day in the same paper Peter Robinson opinion column argued, "Cambodia a tough test for UN dream", (1 April 1992).
 114. *Sydney Morning Herald*, editorial, "Before our troops go to Cambodia" 31 March 1992, p.10.
 115. Tony Parkinson, "killing fields give no peace of mind" *The Australian*, 1 April 1992, p.11, where Liberal Senator Durack's spokesman was also reported as saying: "...the morale of the troops will not be enhanced if large numbers, or even small numbers, are injured fighting for ill-defined aims... regardless of what the troops think, there is a political requirement to define the aims so that we understand the nature of our contribution... If there is a departure from the original objectives of the Paris peace settlements, every country should be entitled to reassess its position."
 116. *The Canberra Times*, 2 April 1992.
 117. D. Lague, *Financial Review*, 2 April 1992.
 118. M. Methelal "Peace in Cambodia may yet bring battle at home", *The Age* op. ed. page, 2 April 1992.
 119. *Sydney Morning Herald*, editorial, "On into the killing fields" 3 April 1992.
 120. *The Australian* editorial "Treading warily in Cambodia", 3 April 1992, p.10.
 121. F. Devine, "A future in Asia requires courage", *The Australian*, Monday 6 April 1992, p.9.
 122. F. Devine, *The Australian*, *ibid*. Devine enlarges on this theme by reference to conversations with Cardinal Edward Clancy gleaned from the Cardinal's recent inspection tour of Australian Catholic Relief's programs inside Cambodia. Clancy noted "many Cambodians have comparably inflated expectations of Australia's capacity to help." Clancy identified the two biggest threats as the "totalitarian Khmer Rouge" and "endemic official corruption (of Phnom Penh)". Clancy noted "ACR and Australia generally
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have made a moral commitment to Cambodia from which it is now almost impossible to withdraw". Further, the circumstances under which ACR would withdraw would "probably rely on the judgement of people on the spot."

123. *Sunday Telegraph*, (Sydney), 29 March 1992, p.48. 'Insight' page of 'views on important issues'.
124. See Sue Downie /Phnom Penh, "Cambodians 'have fought final battle', *Weekend Australian*, 4-5.4.92, p.8, Sue Downie "Cambodia in the hands of a peace broker", *Weekend Australian*, 9-10 May 1992, p. 13, "Diggers rough it in Cambodia", *Weekend Australian*, 18-19 April 1992, p.9, "Evans supports Japan as peace-keeper in Cambodia", *Financial Review* 10 April 1992, p.10.
125. "Changing world order offers hope to the underdogs" *The Australian*, 23 June 1992, p.13.
126. G. Klintworth, *The Australian*, *ibid.*, Klintworth deliberately distorts the UNTAC mandate here in order to prop up his own political barrel. The UN mandate is a much wider one and includes provision for the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops.
127. In the wake of the Gulf war outcome of early 1991 Gary Klintworth argued in "Crimes Against Humanity", *Far East Economic Review*, 20 December 1990, p.14 that "Cambodia's Pol Pot would seem to be a better candidate to appear before a war crimes tribunal than Iraq's Saddam Hussein."
128. *Sydney Morning Herald*, editorial, "Cold comfort in Cambodia", 12 June 1992, p.14.
129. The problem here was it depended on which UN observer you were talking too. On the verification issue it has surely been the fundamental question of the whole war. On the handing over of power to the SNC this was a KR response to UNTAC favoring the Hun Sen administration and not fulfilling its UN mandate. *The Sydney Morning Herald* position on this was quite clear. Its editorial ("Cambodia: the path to peace", 31 August 1990, p.10) stated "But control of day-to-day affairs of State- including foreign affairs, defence and public security, finance and information - would be turned

over to UN administrators until elections could be held and a new government installed Hun Sen has balked at ceding that much power. But any outright rejection of the UN peace plan would surely rebound against Hun Sen.”

130. Such a view was supported by a number of internationally based journalists covering the issue. See for example Jacques Bekaert writing in the *Bangkok Post*.
131. Surely if the KR had protested too early they would have been accused of not allowing UNTAC sufficient time to implement their administration or confirm that Vietnamese troops were withdrawn?
132. I don't enter the realm of discussion here about who actually holds state power in Cambodia in international law except to say that as the Khmer Rouge remains on the SNC, as the NADK faction, and sits at the UN, The *Herald* position is tantamount to calling for self-determination and foreign intervention in the one breath?
133. *The Australian*, editorial, "Disarming the Khmer Rouge", 15 June 1992, p.10.
134. *The Australian's* editorial on 15 June 1992.
135. *Sydney Morning Herald/Age Good Weekend* 26 September 1992, pp.18-22.
136. Sessor in his April 1992 *The New Yorker* article (*op. cit.*) points out that dealing in cash encourages currency fluctuations that further impoverishes the Khmer masses in Phnom Penh. Australia getting a real estate bargain is probably what Wright means by Australia gaining "pragmatic benefits" over its involvement in Cambodia.
137. *Foreign Correspondent* (ABC-TV) and *Dateline* (SBS-TV) Saturday 26 September 1992.
138. This was confirmed by the author with another Australian journalist who made the journey from Bangkok.

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139. That occasion was when a journalist reporting for *Dateline* in May 1992 flew by UNTAC helicopter (Australian contingent) to one of the check points near the Eastern border of Cambodia. He interviewed an Australian soldier stationed there. The soldier confirmed that there was absolutely no monitoring of human or commercial traffic from Vietnam into Cambodia.
 140. James Pringle report *The Australian* 22 October 1991 and AFP, "Cambodian refugees safe from forced repatriation". *Weekend Australian* 23-24 October 1991.
 141. *Sydney Morning Herald* editorial, 31 March 1992.
 142. *West Australian* 13 April 1992. p.35.
 143. *Newsweek*, in *The Bulletin*, April 1992, pp.76-79.
 144. Editorial, 'Avoiding the racism debate', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 January 1992, p.12.
 145. This viewpoint was echoed by an editorial in *The Australian* 19 March 1992, p.8, and was critical of the failure of the Business Migration Plan to attract people to Australia who were matched to labour market shortages.
 146. Editorial, "The refugees and the rotters", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 February 1992, p.10.
 147. "Keating forecasts cut in immigration" *Daily Telegraph Mirror*, 10 April 1992, p.22.
 148. *Daily Telegraph Mirror* 14 April 1992, p.3.
 149. *Daily Telegraph Mirror* 14 April 1992, p.12.
 150. Editorial, "Our Inept Refugee Program", *The Australian*, 15 April 1992.
 151. Letter to editor, "The lessons of history", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 April 1992, p.14.

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152. Margaret Easterbrook, "Boat people caught in the rush", *The Age*, 7 May 1992, p.11, op-ed. page, argued, "One factor that has been cast aside is that the Cambodians have fled their homeland in fear of their lives with only the clothes on their backs." Tanner's cartoon the same day shows two refugees staggering ashore (into Australia) to be immediately faced by a stern-faced Gerry Hand. The same day the *Sydney Morning Herald* (7 May 1992, p.5) reported "Hand ignores human rights protests" and "We'd rather die here than be sent home, say refugees." The second article used photos that highlighted the divisions being created in the community with one showing a refugee in Port Hedland behind a cyclone wire fence, the second showed local miners saying they wanted jobs for locals first and the third showing the local Mayor with hands covering his face in anguish. The same day (7 May 1992), the editorial, noted that Hand wanted to send "a clear message" to potential boat people.
 153. *Daily Telegraph Mirror*, 11 May 1992.
 154. *Daily Telegraph Mirror* 11 May 1992, p.12.
 155. *The Weekend Australian* 9-10 May 1992, p.2. the *Weekend Australian Review* section the same day led with a major article by science writer Julian Cribb on the "growing conflict, between world population, food supply and the environment". The article served as a contextualiser for the McGuinness anti-compassion line, the *Weekend Australian Review*, 9-10 May 1992, pp.1-2.
 156. *Sunday Telegraph* "Let's freeze immigration until the recession ends, too many going onto dole payments", 10 May 1992, p.21.
 157. *Sydney Morning Herald* 'Spectrum' section, 6 June 1992, pp. 35-36. A spokeswoman from the Refugee Council of Australia interviewed by the author in mid 1992 argued that certain sections of the Jenkins article could only have come from the Department of Immigration. To make matters worse, they may have been inaccurate.

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158. Editorial, "Equal Treatment for refugees", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 June 1992, p.16.
 159. For example see "Tribunal plan cuts refugee rights", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 June 1992, p.3.
 160. ABC Radio, *Report From Asia*, 21 March 1993.
 161. Chomsky and Herman take this filtering a step further and argue news filtering is one aspect of what they call a "propaganda model" which explains the role of Western media. Under this model double standards abound. The broad conflict between 'principle' and 'pragmatism' is characteristic of Australian foreign policy in recent years. Witness the Kuwait versus East Timor intervention debate 1991-92.

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- organise seminars, workshops, and conferences to promote research in the field;
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