

MODULE: Cambodia

Timeline Reflections

Grade Level & Time:

This unit was developed for students aged 16 and older. We are following the [Age Appropriate Guidelines](#) from the USHMM. We recommend 45 - 60 minutes per lesson.

Subject:

History; English/Language Arts; Multi-disciplinary.

Overview

Rationale (Goals):

With the limited time that teachers often have across the curriculum, it is challenging to ensure that content, context, and complexity are adequately addressed. Building a timeline that integrates key historical events with individual reflections (by reporters and survivors) and the international response provides a starting point in examining how and why the war in Cambodia happened and how and why peace has manifested itself. And yet, the goal should not be to reach definitive answers but rather to allow participants to reflect on their own questions and understanding. The timeline can be built in layers so that each layer contributes to the understanding of a different aspect of war and peace in Cambodia. A step-by-step approach allows participants to make inferences about the interrelatedness of time and geographic location to the events and stories and promotes critical thinking about the impact on various groups in Cambodia.

Context:

From approximately 781 until 1431, Cambodia was part of the Khmer Empire ruled from the city of Angkor. The Khmer Empire was ruled by many kings and included parts of Burma, Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam. During the decline of the Khmer Empire, wars occurred from 1432-1841 between Siam (Thailand) and Vietnam, which occurred in areas of Cambodia. Because of these conflicts, Cambodia's power was diminished and it eventually became a protectorate of France. The colonization by France continued until World War II, when the Japanese encouraged Asian colonies to declare independence from their colonizers. Japan controlled and

occupied Indochina until the end of World War II. As the Allies began to dominate the war in the Pacific, the French again took control of countries in Southeast Asia. As a result, anti-colonial groups in Indochina, including the Khmer Issarak, were formed to fight for independence. In response to French control, the First Indochina War began in 1946 in Vietnam. The French were finally defeated in 1953 at Dien Ben Phu in Vietnam, ending control by the French in Southeast Asia and precipitating the end of French colonial rule worldwide. During this time, future Khmer Rouge leaders, Saloth Sar (Pol Pot) and Ieng Sery meet in Paris where they are students. While there, they study the theories of communism and discuss the idea of independence for Cambodia. The Geneva Convention of 1954 formally recognizes the countries of Cambodia, North Vietnam, South Vietnam, and Laos.

In 1955 during the first election, Norodom Sihanouk (Prince Sihanouk) and the Sangkum Reastr Niyum (the People's Socialist Communist Party) won a large majority of the vote. The results of the election surprised the leaders of the Khmer People's Revolutionary Party (KPRP), one of the leading revolutionary parties. Soon after Prince Sihanouk's win, one of the leaders of the KPRP, Sieu Heng, defected to Sihanouk's government in 1959. This allowed the government to arrest and murder many members of the KPRP. Surviving members of the KPRP met in 1960 and elected new officers, during this meeting they also changed their name to the Workers' Party of Kampuchea (WPK) and elected Pol Pot as secretary. At the same time, the Viet Cong had organized and began moving personnel and arms along the Ho Chi Minh trail in Vietnam as hostilities between North and South Vietnam escalated. The trail ran from North Vietnam to South Vietnam, passing through parts of Laos and Cambodia. As the war in Vietnam (Second Indochina War) escalated, the United States became more involved. With the events of the Gulf of Tonkin when the North Vietnamese were accused of attacking US battleships, Prince Sihanouk cut ties with the U.S. and instructed his military advisor, Lon Nol to drive communists out of Phnom Penh. Pol Pot relocates to an area of Northeastern Cambodia, and he meets with the governments of China and Vietnam and creates an alliance. During this time, he also changed the name of the party to the Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK), Prince Sihanouk named them, the Khmer Rouge (Red Khmer)

Continued fighting occurred in Vietnam, and in 1969 the United States bombs targeted North Vietnamese forces using the Ho Chi Minh Trail which passed through Cambodia. Many Cambodian Civilians were killed which helped the Khmer Rouge grow exponentially. In March of 1970, Lon Nol backed by the CIA, assumed power in Cambodia, while Prince Sihanouk was overseas, Sihanouk sought asylum in China where he was encouraged to support the Khmer Rouge to overthrow Lon Nol. The communist North Vietnamese military trained the Khmer Rouge military who made significant advances in Cambodia and became the dominant military force there. In Vietnam, the North Vietnamese defeated the American and South Vietnamese armies while the Khmer Rouge gained control of huge areas within Cambodia. With the signing of the Paris Peace Accords in 1973, the United States began to withdraw troops from Vietnam, but still aided Lon Nol in his war against the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia.

On April 17, 1975 (Year Zero) the capital city of Cambodia, Phnom Penh fell to the army of the Khmer Rouge. Foreigners, including journalists, and some Cambodians sought refuge at the French Embassy. Government officials were executed, including Lon Non, brother of Lon Nol.

(Lon Nol had managed to flee the country). With Phnom Penh under control, the Khmer Rouge forced the entire population out of the city at gunpoint. The Khmer Rouge saw themselves as agrarian revolutionaries and sought to punish and kill those who were educated or appeared to be educated. Military and government officials hid their identity to avoid being arrested. Men, women, and children were all forced to move to villages outside of the city. Throughout the countryside, agricultural cooperatives were established where individuals were forced to work long hours under threat of torture and death.

Angkar Padevat, “the revolutionary organization”, was the name given to the leadership of the Khmer Rouge. Individuals were addressed as, comrade, but the organization was known as Angkar. Pol Pot (Brother Number 1) and Nuon Chea (Brother Number 2) were the two paramount leaders and created the first 4-year economic plan that sought to collectivize the country around an agrarian revolutionary economy. All personal property was to be relinquished to Angkar to be used by the community. Families were also separated; husbands from wives, and children from their parents and forced into work groups. Almost all the work was focused on agriculture and rice production. The plan was to use the rice to feed the people, use it as seed for further rice growing, and to sell the bulk of the rice for a profit. Workers were forced to work long hours with little to no food and under the threat of torture or death

Topic:

- Reflections on historical events, individual stories, and international response in Cambodia.
- Reflections on photography and its role in conflict and in peace.

Key Question(s):

- What is the role of photography in conflict and peace?
- In photographing an area of experiencing war, conflict, or acts of genocide, which codes become most important when trying to gather photographic evidence?
- How are individual stories shaped by historical events and international response in times of conflict?

Educational Outcomes:

At the end of these lessons, the students will be able to

- Describe the interrelatedness of historical events, individual stories, and the international response in Cambodia,
- Describe the war in Cambodia from multiple perspectives and various groups,
- Evaluate and analyze the role of photography in conflict and peace,
- Determine unique perspectives on peace (in a post-conflict society).

Teacher preparation:

Please be sure you are familiar with the [IHRA Guidelines](#) and [USHMM Guidelines for Teaching the Holocaust](#), especially the [Rationale and Learning Objectives](#). We developed these lessons with these resources in mind.

Methodology:

Participants will partake in an in-depth discussion on historical events, individual stories, and international response in times of conflict. They will write, read, think about, and evaluate their work by engaging in individual, pair or group, and whole-class activities.

Participants will analyze three layers. As each layer is added, new insights, connections, and questions emerge. The three layers (sets) of timeline cards are:

1. Individuals (reporters and survivors), which provide content from multiple perspectives
2. Historical events, which put the content into context including introducing a map of the country
3. International response, which add another level of complexity

Lessons

Before the activities, the teacher should ensure a safe space for participants by introducing a list of personal norms or group agreements to be followed throughout the lesson (see example in Further reading below).

Lesson 1: Timeline activity

Before the lesson, the timeline cards of each year should be placed on a wall in the classroom.

Note: Teachers and students may wish to add more dates and events to the timeline as appropriate for their setting and purpose.

Step I:

Participants work in pairs or in groups. Each pair/group receives one or more *Individuals* cards (see Appendix). They reflect on the following questions for each card:

- How was the individual affected by the war in Cambodia?
- How was the individual's family affected by the war in Cambodia?
- How is the individual affected by peace after the war?
- Choose two-three words that left an impression on you after reading the entry card and explain why.

Following this, participants place the card on the timeline.

Step II:

Participants work in pairs or in groups. Each pair/group receives one or more *Historical events* cards (see Appendix). They reflect on the following questions for each card:

- Who was affected by the historical event?
- How did the historical event impact the war in Cambodia?
- What does the historical event add to your understanding of the individual reflections?
- What does the historical event add to your understanding of peace after the war?

Following this, participants place the card on the timeline.

Step III:

Participants work in pairs or in groups. Each pair/group receives one or more *International Response Cards* (see Appendix). They reflect on the following questions for each card:

- Who was affected by the international response?

- How did that international response impact the war in Cambodia?
- What does that international response add to your understanding of the individual reflections and historical events?
- What does the international response add to your understanding of peace after the war?

Following this, participants place the card on the timeline.

When finished, participants are asked to take a gallery walk, to view the timeline again, and to record their observations.

When finished, the whole group participates in a debrief and they reflect on the following questions:

- What did you observe?
- Some of the cards are placed on the timeline in clusters. What assertions can be made from this evidence?
- Which events are pivotal to the peace treaty?
- Based on the evidence from the timeline, what do you think about how and why the war in Cambodia happened?
- Based on the evidence from the timeline, what do you think peace looks like in today's Cambodia?

Lesson 2: Photography Records

The timeline is left untouched after Part 1.

Step I:

Participants work in pairs or in groups. Each pair/group receives and reflects on one or more photos that record the war and peace after war in Cambodia. The suggested reflection process for this activity is the D.A.R. model (*Describe-Analyze-Relate*). Through DAR, the facilitator pays attention to how each question they offer scaffolds, or builds upon, prior ideas to support individual and collective meaning-making and understanding (Dawson & Kiger, 2018):

1. *Describe the setting, one thing or person that you see in the photo.*

(Participants are first invited to fully perceive and describe what they see. This is the basis for participant inferences and predictions for the next two types of reflection.)

2. *What do you think is happening in the photo?*

(Next, participants are invited to Analyze and infer based on prior observation and evidence (Part 1). In the Analyze stage of D.A.R, it is important to explore how and why multiple interpretations might be made based on the same observation, which provides

insight into the unique perspectives we all hold. Throughout this process, the focus is generally on participant engagement in dialogic sense-making; the focus is on the teacher asking questions like “What is another interpretation?” rather than posing statements like “Yes, that’s it.”)

Step II:

Participants share all their (multiple) observations with the whole group (showing the photo while sharing their observations). Following this, they receive the captions and descriptions to the respective photos without the dates.

- *What do the caption and description add to your understanding of the photo?*
- *Can you relate the photo to some historical events, individual stories, and international response?*

Finally, participants are invited to synthesize through collective meaning-making, to move from making “sense” to making “meaning” or understanding, as they Relate and connect their sense-making and textual/visual evidence to another photo, historical event, and/or individual stories.

Step III:

Following this and based on their observations, participants place the photos on the timeline. They share their reasons for choosing a particular year. At this point, the teacher provides the correct year if some of the photos are placed incorrectly. The whole group is invited to take a gallery walk again and record their observations.

Follow-up questions:

- What did you observe?
- What do you notice about where and how the photos are placed? (Optional-Why did you place the photos differently at first?)
- What does photography / visual records / evidence add to your understanding of conflict and peace?

Lesson 3: Through Our Eyes

Step I:

Participants are asked to partake in a virtual and visual conversation. The teacher shares the link to an interactive platform (such as Padlet) with the question:

- What does peace look like to you?

Participants are asked to answer the question with a photo. They can take a photo of anything that reminds them of the word peace, that they relate to the word peace, that makes them feel at peace, that makes them feel their country and people are at peace, etc.

Step II:

Participants post photos about their reflection on peace on the platform. The teacher prints the photos at school and places them on a wall in the classroom. The group takes a gallery walk to study the photos and record their observations. (The activity can be done in a virtual setting too where the participants are asked to like, comment, and ask questions on the posts). The group once again engages in a reflection process based on the D.A.R. model by considering questions such as:

- Describe the setting, one thing or person that you see in the photo.
- What do you think is happening in the photo?
- Can you relate the photo to another photo on the wall, an event, or story about peace and reflections on peace?

Following this, participants can be asked to explain what is really happening in the photos that they submitted, as well as how they themselves view peace as reflected in their photo.

An insightful wrap-up question could be if and how their understanding of peace (and the photos they took) was impacted by the experience of war and conflict by them or their families. What does peace look like after a war/conflict?

Step III:

Based on the discussion / reflection, participants are asked to create an action plan for peace (or for peace after war if the lesson is done in post-conflict countries). Students will create their own Student Action Projects (adapted from Echoes & Reflections), considering the following:

- Identify an issue in your school or community.
- Gather information through research, recognizing the complexity of the problem and articulating a clear statement on the issue you are addressing.
- Research and consider solutions, considering what has and has not worked in the past (if applicable), and really “thinking outside the box” for new, innovative ideas. If several ideas are created, narrow it down to the strongest potential solutions that could really work.
- Plan an effective course of action.
- Put your plan into action, recording results and making necessary changes as needed. Report back to the class with updates.

Further Reading:

- Hale, C. Turner, F. (2020). *Imagine: Reflections on Peace*. VII Foundation.
- Dawson, K., Kiger B. (2018). *Drama-based Pedagogy: Activating Learning Across the Curriculum*. Chicago: Intellect Ltd.
- United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. <https://www.ushmm.org/genocide-prevention/countries/cambodia/case-study/introduction/cambodia-1975>
- Timeline source for the cards: <https://reflectionsonpeace.org/countries/cambodia/>
- To learn more about personal norms and classroom agreements, we suggest https://www.facinghistory.org/back-to-school/download/Lesson_Plan_4_Creating_a_Classroom_Contract.pdf
- To learn more about the concept of peace, we suggest <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/defining-the-concept-of-peace/>

Extension Lesson #1:

Photojournalism and Ethics

To begin, the teacher will select one photo for the class to analyze as a class. Select one from the VII Foundation's website for Cambodia.

Share the photo with the class and read the backstory. Then engage in a class discussion on the following questions:

1. Describe the photograph
2. Explain the circumstances of the photo.
3. What are your thoughts about the photo?

Read the Associated Press Code of Ethics for Photojournalists and the National Press Photographers Association Code of Ethics found here:

<https://www.csus.edu/indiv/g/goffs/135%20photojournalism/associated%20press%20ethics%20code.pdf>

Then answer the following questions:

1. In photographing an area of experiencing war, conflict, or acts of genocide, which codes become most important when trying to gather photographic evidence? Explain.

Next, ask the students to visit the VII Foundation's *Imagine: Reflections on Peace* and choose one of the historical photographs of the Cambodian genocide featured on the Cambodia link (<https://reflectionsonpeace.org/countries/cambodia/>).

Have them select one photograph to analyze. Ask them to share their thoughts either in writing or orally.

Study the photograph you chose.

1. Why did you choose this photograph?
2. Copy the caption used under the photograph.
3. Describe the people.
4. Describe the objects.
5. Describe the actions.
6. Infer why you believe this photograph was taken.
7. What questions are left unanswered by this photograph?

8. Do the codes of ethics for photojournalists apply to this photograph and photographer?
Explain.
9. Reflection: What are your thoughts on the ethics in photojournalism? Use examples from what you have learned

Extension Lesson #2:

Cambodian Genocide Survivor Stories

Go to the Documentation Center of Cambodia's collection of survival testimonies (<http://dccam.org/survivor-stories>).

Choose one story. While reading, answer the following questions.

1. Whose story did you choose and what is their title?

2. On the map below, circle any cities mentioned in your survivor's story. If you do not see it on the map, look up the location online and mark the place.



3. Describe an event that happened during your survivor's early life.

4. April 17, 1975, called Day One, is when Phnom Penh fell to communist Khmer Rouge. In the days that followed, over two million residents were forced from the city. Explain what happened to your survivor on April 17th.

5. Summarize what life was like during the genocide for your survivor.

Timeline Reflections: *Individuals cards*

I was forced to join the Khmer Rouge in 1972 because my village was controlled by the Khmer Rouge. In 1974 I was arrested by the Khmer Rouge because I was accused of being a spy for the Lon Nol regime. But I was set free because I was so young. That is the worst memory I could remember. I was serving them but instead they accused me of being a spy. We had very little to eat. I was so depressed. Between 1975-1979 I was forced to work as part of a mobile team working on irrigation and dam projects. At that time, I was feeling that my life was in darkness with no hope of being alive. Everything seemed hopeless.

-Roeung Hung, former Khmer Rouge soldier

In early 1980, I returned to see the entire nation on the move- people were trekking to refugee camps in Thailand or returning to the homes from which they had been uprooted. They were searching for their loved ones and scavenging for food. Phnom Penh was a wasteland of decaying and melancholy buildings, populated by traumatised people desperately trying to rebuild their shattered lives. In vain, I searched for people I had known and loved. I visited their abandoned homes. They were empty and full of ghosts. I found only one friend from the past, a once-delicate city girl whom the Khmer Rouge had turned into a rough peasant. Her hair was clipped short, her copper-coloured skin had coarsened in the sun, and her beautiful hands were covered in sores. -Jon Swain, reporter

I arrived in Cambodia in 1989, more than a decade after the Khmer Rouge had embarked upon its three years of slaughter, rewound the clocks to Year Zero, and taken the country back to the Middle Ages. The extent of the genocide they had perpetrated was exposed when Vietnam invaded Cambodia in 1978 and drove the Khmer Rouge over the Thai border. The remnants of their army were fed in the United Nations 'displaced persons' camps along with hundreds of thousands of starving civilians. Within weeks of the arrival of these decommissioned troops, ruthless Realpolitik took over, and the Thai, Chinese, American, and European governments, resentful of the Vietnamese, rearmed and rehabilitated the Khmer Rouge and created an alliance of guerilla groups to fight Vietnam in Cambodia.

- Gary Knight, photographer

My freedom now is not good and freedom is the most important thing for anyone, more than anything. I have the UN Treaty of Human Rights on my desk, I wish every country would follow that. The Khmer Rouge Tribunal has had limited success, they rejected the demands of the victims for compensation, and none of the aid that went to the tribunal went to the victims. I am very angry about that. We deserve compensation. Compensation is the most important part of justice and with no compensation there is no justice. Compensation could help the victims survive the peace. -Bou Meng, survivor

In 1973, I was a student in sociology in Brittany and was very motivated to experience the ills of our world firsthand. During the summer break, a friend and I dreamed of getting to Cambodia to hone our skills as burgeoning photographers. We managed to fly into Phnom Penh a couple of weeks ahead of the end of the US B-52 bombing of the country.

That for me was a revelation in covering a conflict, a big leap after trailing my camera along the student protests of the early 1970's in France. It also became a jumping off point from university and the entry into a career as a photojournalist. Reporting that war became a passion, and with the fall of Phnom Penh to the Khmer Rouge on April 75, it altered my life forever."

— Roland Neveu

To Western eyes, the preservation of Pol Pot's cremation site is wrong. He was responsible for one of the worst mass killings in modern times. But Cambodians reason differently. Even survivors express approval. Still, I was surprised by the response of a teenage girl passing by Pol Pot's grave when I visited. "Pol Pot was trying to do something good for Cambodia and was betrayed by Ta Mok," she said to me.

"For Cambodians it is preserving evidence that is important," said Chhang. "It is the fear that the world will not believe. The gravesite is just to show Pol Pot lived here, Pol Pot died here. It is evidence, and people do not want it removed."

— Jon Swain, *Fragile as a Flower*

“More than three decades later, Hun Sen is still in power, having outmaneuvered all his opponents. Although his long rule has been defined by repression and controversial election victories, the strongman is also recognised by many older people as Cambodia’s saviour from the genocidal Khmer Rouge regime (to which he had nonetheless once belonged). He has always denied complicity with the regime and warns regularly that only his leadership stops Cambodia from returning to civil war.”

— Jon Swain, *Fragile as a Flower*

When I walked to school, I saw anti-tank mines. When I was seven or eight years old, coming back from school, I would run, play; I had no idea. Then a man in my village got exploded by an anti-tank mine. A lady lost two sons. So she became—well, her brain was not good, because she lost two sons. When they carried the second son’s body to the village for the funeral, I saw the relatives cry, and I saw a piece of the body and I felt very sad. But because I was young, I didn’t know what to do.

I started to learn more about how many land mines and unexploded ordnance there are in Cambodia and how many people they kill. I decided I wanted to be a de-miner.

In my training class was a general. The first day, there were only two women out of about 20 students. The men were like, “What? You are a girl, you come and do this job?” We were a joke to them. During the training, you had to role-play. Me and the general—he wanted to be number one, I wanted to be number one. So we fought very hard in the class. When we role-played, one day he is my team leader, the next day I am his team leader. I ordered him to do this, do this, do this, and then he said, “Oh, I understand.” Even though I am small and I am a girl, he saw that I wasn’t a joke. In the end he was number one in the class and I was number two. In 2011, I became a qualified de-miner.”

— Sophary Sophin, *Excavating the Past, Imagining a New Life*

The terrible destruction wrought by a US B-52 bomber which had mistakenly dropped its 30 tons of bombs on the main street of Neak Leung during the Lon Nol war, killing and wounding 400 people, had long been covered up by new buildings, and the town was flourishing. But the human cost of Cambodia's wars was easy to find amid this new prosperity. After we had been speaking for a few minutes, we encountered Heng Sokha, 55, an amputee begging in the street for money. He stood on his one good leg and supported himself with a crude wooden crutch as he held out his faded army cap for money. Conscripted at the age of 23 into Hun Sen's army, he had been sent to the border with Thailand to fight the remnants of the Khmer Rouge who had retreated there after the Vietnamese invasion.

Shrapnel from an exploding artillery shell had smashed his leg. He had a hopeless air. As with the former Lon Nol soldier, his life had not improved in peacetime, despite his having given a leg for his country. His government pension of 400,000 riels a month (about \$100) was not enough to live on. To survive, his wife was selling corn at a street stall.

"My children do not want me to beg for money, but I am desperate," he said. "If I do not beg, I do not have enough money to buy medicine. I do not know how to make money. I only had three years' education."

— Jon Swain, *Fragile as a Flower*

Timeline Reflections: *Historical events cards*

1964-1965

The Gulf of Tonkin Incident sparks open hostilities between the US and North Vietnam

Sihanouk severs diplomatic ties with the US and expels communist leadership from Phnom Penh; Pol Pot establishes a base of operations for the Khmer Rouge in Northeastern Cambodia.

1965-1967

Cambodia fractures across political lines

Sihanouk fails to balance a neutral foreign policy. He allows the North Vietnamese and VC to operate in Eastern Cambodia, while simultaneously permitting pro-American General Lon Nol to go after domestic communists.

1967-1970

A revolt in Battambang sets the stage for all out civil war.

Peasants fight back against Lon Nol's forces as they crack down on illegal rice sales. The Khmer Rouge attempt to use this momentum to kick off a large-scale communist uprising and begin small scale military operations.

1968

The Tet Offensive breaks American political support for the war

Protests and crumbling morale threaten the war effort after a massive, coordinated offensive by North Vietnamese and Vietcong begins on the Vietnamese holiday of Tet.

1969

The first American bombs fall on Cambodia.

Congress will not be informed for another four years.

March 1970

Prime Minister Lon Nol seizes control of the Cambodian government.

Cambodian parliament grants Lon Nol emergency powers, which he uses to order all North Vietnamese and VC out of the country. The ousted Sihanouk flees to China, where he encourages resistance.

April 1970

State-sanctioned massacres of ethnic Vietnamese begin across Cambodia.

May 1970

Sihanouk endorses the Khmer Rouge from China.

The former leader assumes nominal leadership of FUNK (National United Front of Kampuchea), a Khmer Rouge aligned rebellion government. Military operations are run by Pol Pot and Khmer Rouge hardliners.

1970-1971

The North Vietnamese launch offensive on behalf of the Khmer Rouge.

American and South Vietnamese forces launch counter operations on Cambodian soil. The initial gains made by the North Vietnamese help secure Khmer Rouge foothold from which to fight.

1972-1973

Lon Nol loses ground as the Americans begin to exit the region.

Badly outmatched by the growing Khmer Rouge, Lon Nol tries to cease hostilities as the Paris Peace Accords are signed. The Khmer Rouge press on and gain further ground.

1973

US Operation Freedom Deal drops more ordinance on Cambodia than was dropped on Japan during the entirety of World War 2

1973-1974

The Khmer Rouge purge Sihanouk loyalists as the North Vietnamese gain ground.

Sihanouk, having granted the Khmer Rouge early legitimacy, ceases to be useful. Pol Pot and his lieutenants seize full political control. A rift forms between Mao's CPC and the USSR. North Vietnam has strong ties to the USSR, while the Khmer Rouge align with China.

April 17th, 1975

Phnom Penh falls to the Khmer Rouge.

Days later Saigon falls to the North Vietnamese. The Khmer Rouge evacuate the city. While Khmer Rouge atrocities were reported and witnessed with gradual escalation throughout the civil war, mass killing begins as they assume control of the country. Cambodia is now Democratic Kampuchea.

1975-1979

An estimated 3 million die in Democratic Kampuchea, as the Khmer Rouge invoke the country's Angkorian past and attempt to return the country to an agrarian economy.

Executions account for at least a million deaths, while forced labor and second order effects of Khmer Rouge rule account for many more. It is the only genocide in history where a single ethnic group turns in on itself. The Khmer Rouge receive the support of China and Sihanouk.

1977

Pol Pot begins to purge “traitors” from within the Khmer Rouge.

As chaos begins to upend Khmer Rouge organization, a Battalion Commander named Hun Sen flees with his soldiers to Vietnam. There, he forms a partnership with the Vietnamese in preparation for invasion.

December 1978

Vietnam invades Cambodia and within a month seizes Phnom Penh and installs a pro-Vietnamese government.

Hun Sen, a former Khmer Rouge, is appointed Foreign Minister and deputy Prime Minister. In 1985 Hun Sen is made Prime Minister, a position he retains to this day. The Khmer Rouge flees west and rebuilds inside Thailand.

1979-1982

Three groups oppose and resist the Vietnamese backed regime.

The Khmer Rouge enjoys international recognition and begins to try to change its image. The KPNLF, a pro-western, anti-communist faction, is created by former politicians from the late 1960s Cambodian government. They are backed by the Thais, and later, the US. Sihanouk forms FUNCINPEC, a royalist faction which collaborates with the Khmer Rouge. The three groups form a government in absentia and use UN supported ‘Displaced Persons Camps’ on the Thai border with Cambodia as bases for their soldiers and their families.

1982-1991

Civil war claims hundreds of thousands of lives and displaces millions.

The Khmer Diaspora, began in the 1970s, scatters Khmer communities throughout the world, including Thailand, France, the US, and Australia.

1992-1993

The Khmer Rouge flouts the peace agreement.

UN forces clash with the Khmer Rouge as they massacre ethnic Vietnamese and refuse to participate in elections.

1997-1998

Hun Sen seizes power in a brief but violent coup.

In subsequent elections in 1998, the CPP firmly controls most of the coalition government with FUNCINPEC and the newly formed SRP. Pol Pot dies in a Khmer Rouge camp in the Northwest.

Timeline Reflections: *International response cards*

1954

The Geneva Conference recognizes new independent states in Cambodia, North Vietnam, South Vietnam, and Laos.

1973-1974

The North Vietnamese gain ground and align with the USSR while Pol Pot finds support in China.

1979

Prince Sihanouk appeals to the UN Security Council to intervene on behalf of Democratic Kampuchea. China invades Vietnam in retaliation for their incursion.

The UN votes to recognize the Khmer Rouge, not the Vietnamese-aligned delegation, as the legitimate government of Cambodia. Pol Pot steps down as Prime Minister, focusing on the resistance effort.

1991

Paris Peace Agreement marks the official end to the Cambodian Vietnamese war and over three decades of continuous warfare in Cambodia.

The agreement gives the Cambodian people the right to fair and free elections and establishes the UN as a transitional authority, UNTAC.

1998-2006

A tribunal, called the ECCC, is formed and begins, backed by the UN and lead by Cambodian and international judges.

Map of Cambodia



Photography records



A government soldier fires his outdated M1 carbine at the Khmer Rouge from a foxhole. Kien Svay, Route 1, August 1973. ©Roland Neveu

Photography records



The fall of Phnom Penh April 1975 A unit of government soldiers surrenders to the Khmer Rouge and are marched through the city towards the Olympic stadium, where thousands were bludgeoned to death. ©Roland Neveu

Photography records



The fall of Phnom Penh. The infamous gate of the French Embassy. Around 600 people, including many wealthy and powerful Cambodians, sought sanctuary in the French Embassy, along with remaining foreigners, including the press corps. ©Roland Neveu

Photography records



Operation Eagle Pull April 1975 The US evacuation lasted all morning. Flights of US military helicopters landed at a school not far from the US Embassy to evacuate the last American military and civilian personnel from Phnom Penh, abandoning Cambodia to the Khmer Rouge. Cambodians are kept outside the fence. ©Roland Neveu

Photography records



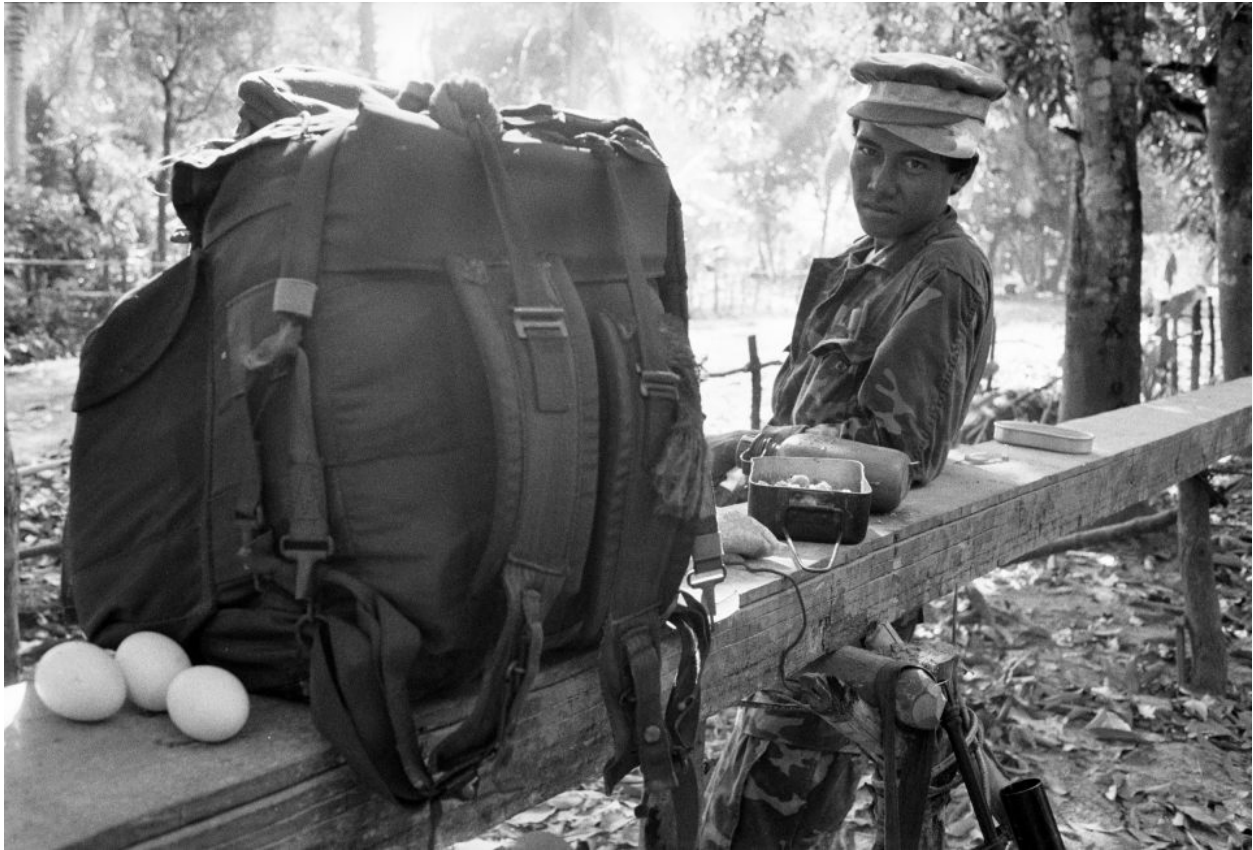
Khmer Rouge guerrillas in a remote village near Pol Pot's base in Anlong Veng, northern Cambodia. 1990
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Photography records



Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPLNF) guerrillas cross a river in northern Cambodia on a long-range patrol. 1990 ©Gary Knight/VII

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A KPNLF guerrilla rests in a village a few kilometres from UN-run displaced person camps in Thailand where he was based. ©Gary Knight/VII

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A spirit house at the grave of former Khmer Rouge leader Pol Pot. After his death, the grave became a shrine for Thai gamblers who routinely pray there for good luck in the lottery. ©Gary Knight/VII

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Sophary Sophin grew up in the shadow of the Khmer Rouge. Her father was one of the educated “April 17” people whom the Khmer Rouge banished to the countryside, where he married and lived as an agrarian peasant. Sophin works in ordinance disposal for Cambodian Self Help De-mining and leads the Rural Schools Village Program. ©Gary Knight/VII

Photography records



The military and police are at the center of politics in Cambodia, and hundreds of police and military officers serve on the central committee of Hun Sen's political party. His bodyguard unit—a military force personally under his control—went from approximately 60 people in the mid-1990s to around 23,000 soldiers by 2015.

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