



# Japan's Role and Its First Successful Peace Mission in Cambodia

Ratha Heang

Department of International Cooperation, Royal University of Phnom Penh, Phnom Penh, Cambodia

Email: heangratha4@gmail.com

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## Abstract

After World War II, Japan initiated the peace mission in Cambodia, becoming the first country to deploy its Self-Defense Forces (SDF) in collaboration with the United Nations. Noticeably, Japan was incapacitated from utilizing military force after World War II. Its force is exclusively applicable in the context of a peace mission. This article aims to demonstrate the strong commitment of Japanese leaders, authorities, volunteers, neighboring countries, ASEAN Nations, and the international community to collaborate in resolving the conflict effectively and achieving peace for the citizens of Cambodia.

## Subject Areas

International Relations

## Keywords

Cambodia, Moist Ideology, Peacekeeping Operation (PKO), Official Development Assistance (ODA), Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Supreme National Council (SNC), United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC), Self-Defense Forces (SDF)

## 1. Introduction

This Cambodia was devastated by the civil war for nearly 30 years. More importantly, the cause of this civil war was the impact of the Vietnam War and the massive bombing by the U.S. during the 1970s. After that, Cambodia faced difficulties with unstable leadership due to the Lon Nol coupe delta of the Samdech Norodom Sihanouk, the former King of the Kingdom of Cambodia. According to this uncertainty, the guerrillas of the Khmer Rouge came to power and took control of the country from 1975 to 1979 under Pol Pot and Noun Chea. The two leaders complied with the wrong policies the so-called "Maoist ideology"

that caused mass deaths of Cambodian people during the Democratic Kampuchea period [1]. Also, in April 1976, Pol Pot assumed the position of the first prime minister, while King Sihanouk was restricted to the Royal Palace. The Pol Pot government implemented a notorious “genocide” program based on its radical communist ideology. Adult males and females were segregated, while children above the age of five or six were compelled to engage in labour. Some other nationalities such as Chinese, Muslims, Vietnamese, and Buddhist monks were the main subjects of deportation, execution, or starvation [2].

## 2. Japan’s Mission to Deal with the Cambodian Conflict

By the cruel actions of the Khmer Rouge, Japan and the international community started to discuss and conduct a peace operation in Cambodia. Japan through the United Nations Transitional Authority started the peace mission in Cambodia along with the diplomatic efforts by some of the main relevant parties in order to deal with the Cambodian crisis that served as an initial opportunity for Japan to demonstrate its ability to establish a constructive political influence on the global stage. Previously, Japan had fully committed itself to indirectly supporting conflict settlement by endorsing the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and engaging in a discussion with Vietnam. However, with the announcement of the “International Cooperation Initiative” by the Takeshita administration in May 1988, Japan actively participated in the Cambodian peace process in direct collaboration with Thailand [3].

On the other hand, as cited from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan [4], it was the first time Japan participated in a peace mission since post-World War II. Additionally, Japan sent its many humanitarians and resources to assist Cambodia from step to step such as eight personnel sent from September 1992 to March 1993, a total of five national government officials, 13 local government officials, and 23 individuals from the private sector assigned to UNTAC from May 23 to 28, 1993, 75 civilian police officers dispatched to the Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) from October 1992 to July 1993, and two 600-member engineering contingents of the Japanese Ground Self-Defence Force to UNTAC [4]. Furthermore, the Peacekeeping Operation (PKO) conducted by the Self-Defense Forces (SDF) in Cambodia was an important and unforgettable mission for Japan, as it was their initial involvement in PKOs and a noteworthy initiative for the United Nations. The Cambodia Peacekeeping Operation (PKO) served as a significant assessment of the United Nations-led strategy for addressing other regional and ethnic crises worldwide, including the Gulf War, following the breakdown of the Cold War paradigm [5].

The Tokyo Conference held on 4 to 5 June 1990 provided an opportunity for King Sihanouk, Hun Sen, and Son Sann to engage in discussions regarding the peace process in Cambodia. The conference effectively overcame the military deadlock that occurred after the evacuation of Vietnamese forces, as well as the conflict over politics that ensued after the third unofficial Jakarta summit in

February 1990 ended without success. The Tokyo Conference held great importance as it served as a clear indication of Japan's active involvement in the global peace process, particularly in the context of post-war diplomatic history [6]. According to Takeda [3] have claimed that Japan tried to host the peace process conference in Tokyo in June 5, 1990. The objective of this meeting was to resolve the military impasse that arose after the withdrawal of the Vietnamese forces in September 1989 and address the obstacles hindering a political resolution. At the meeting, Prince Sihanouk, the president of the National Government of Cambodia (NGC), and Hun Sen the prime minister of the Kingdom of Cambodia reached an agreement on a six-point joint communique. The main focus of this agreement is to establish an early cease-fire and create a Supreme National Council (SNC). Moreover, there were two more main actors that assisted Cambodia during the peace-making process. Mr. Yasushi Akashi, who was involved in the negotiation peace process, and Mrs. Sadako Ogata examined the readiness for the return of 350,000 refugees to Cambodia following a resolution that concluded Cambodia's 13-year-long civil conflict [7].

### 3. Japan's Main Role in the Conflict Resolution

Several key reasons facilitated Japan's effective implementation of peacekeeping and nation-building undertakings in Cambodia.

First, qualifications for effectively fulfilling the duty of a dispute mediator in the context of Cambodia. 1) There were three main stages in peacekeeping and nation-building in Cambodia. In the first stage, it must bring an end to the war in the country together with the possibility of using force and the determination to take part in military intervention by a nation or a collective of nations. That's why Japan started to announce the use of self-defence forces to solve this problem. Next, the requirements of the main brokering or facilitating roles are of a different nature in conjunction with the political power, experiences, wisdom, and creativity in conflict solving. Then, it must be trusted by all of the relevant conflict parties in the hands of the main mediator and the main members of the international community or any influential power countries. 2) Problem with legitimacy and confidence, it must have legitimacy as well as the ability to provide the previous offers as a basis for it to gain trust and the recognition of this responsibility is demonstrated by a resolution by the United Nations Security Council. Moreover, the process of peace-making is comprised of a clear and public commitment on the part of the political leader at the highest level, and all parties are able to feel trust in their future in the hands of the political leader who took on the role of mediation. They also look at political power with the skills of influence, sincerity, resource mobilization, impartiality, and the ability to bring the international community along with international support and cooperation to reach an agreement and end the conflict. The government's confidence and its global credibility are crucial factors. International support and cooperation, or at the very least, acceptance, are vital for any accord or accom-

plishment to be achieved. Not all countries or leaders are fully trusted and have confidence. Sometimes, the nation as a whole may have a reputation for being reliable, but its leader may not be, or vice versa. Confidence can vary depending on the circumstances, and a country and its leader may not inspire the same level of confidence in a new environment, potentially due to historical events. 3) Japan is ideally positioned to play a mediating role, Japan demonstrated its willingness to bring together all the conflicting parties and engage in discussions over the plan for resolving the issue in Cambodia. The dedication indicated by the authorities, particularly Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa, was of the utmost significance. It emphasized unflinching determination and highlighted the essential gravity of the situation, since two Japanese nationals tragically lost their lives while fulfilling their duty. At the same time, Japan invited the main three parties to attend the conference, namely the Cambodian People Party, FUNCINPEC, Democratic Kampuchea (Khmer Rouge), and Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF). In addition, the trust of others has been earned by Japan through its robust support and assistance, notably its backing inside the United Nations. Moreover, Japan continually fostered strong alliances of assistance and cooperation with Prince Sihanouk throughout the years, especially during his difficult times. Director General Tadashi Ikeda and Ambassador Yukio Imagawa, among several influential diplomats who have developed an invaluable personal bond with the King throughout the peace process, which had a profound impact on their views in the following stages. Michio Watanabe, a prominent diplomat, played a significant role as the foreign minister at the critical stage of the peace negotiations, demonstrating exceptional dedication. While receiving medical treatment for a life-threatening illness, he actively participated in a meeting with Hun Sen and engaged in a conversation with him in order to further the peace process. Hisashi Owada, who was serving as the Permanent Secretary of the Foreign Ministry at that time had multiple in-depth discussions with Hun Sen. Later, during a meeting with the Permanent Secretary, Hun Sen acknowledged that these discussions had a great impact on his choice to participate in the Paris Conference. 4) Japan's role was embraced by key international countries that encourage Japan to move on from dealing with the issues in Cambodia. Therefore, the entire international community has embraced Japan for its resolute attitude and unwavering display of assurance in its proactive efforts towards political initiatives in the peace process. During the years 1992-94, the Japanese leadership showed significant political commitment and personal involvement in their attempts to support the peace process. Their dedication was particularly noteworthy among the important parties involved and the main participants expressed their appreciation for Japan's efforts. Throughout that time, there were some other key players that made a contribution to the peace process in Cambodia with the assistance and collaboration of three nations such as the United States, France, and Thailand. 5) Skilled officials and negotiators, that is the stage in which all of the parties have to be involved to engage in con-

fidential conversations and mutually analyse and comprehend each other's genuine thoughts. Frequently, this procedure included direct correspondence between the policymakers or negotiators in charge as well as more official means of communication through embassies and offices within the relevant ministries. In the Cambodia case, Japanese policymakers and negotiators met these qualifications; specifically, those who met these qualifications were selected. They built strong professional connections with their colleagues in the crucial nations and leveraged them at times of crisis and when urgent action was needed to develop a shared international policy agreement. 6) Japan was a key donor to help Cambodia with both human and financial resources to reconstruct the country after the war ends. Japan was the largest contributor of Official Development Assistance (ODA) globally at the period when it took the role of providing aid to Cambodia. Not only was it expected to take the lead in international aid projects, but its actual contribution demonstrated its capacity to fulfil this position.

Second, domestic support is crucial for effectively fulfilling an essential duty in the processes of peace-making and nation-building. Whatever of the phase of the process, participating in peace-making and nation-building required a country to allocate a significant number of resources, whether in the form of skilled personnel or financial expense. In addition, Japan engaged in peacekeeping operations by deploying a unit of Self-Defense Forces and dispatching police officers to carry out civilian law enforcement actions in conjunction with Japanese civilian volunteers collaborating with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) [8].

Last but not least, the win-win policy also played a very important role in dealing with the conflict among the main political leaders that have power in Cambodia. This policy can apply in the case of Cambodia to bring all of the conflicting parties together to find common interests and end the conflict. [1] Moreover, this policy comprises three main components: 1) guaranteeing the safety and life of the former Khmer Rouge (without legal obligation, discrimination, and the use of violence); 2) ensuring the preservation of jobs and occupations namely by maintaining the existing status of army personnel including the organizational structure of the Khmer Rouge army and administration as well as the integration of the Khmer Rouge armed forces into the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces (RCAF); and, 3) ensuring the possession of both movable and immovable assets as agreed upon by the major leaders to bring an end to the conflict.

#### **4. In Conclusion**

In the case of Cambodia, there were several main factors that helped it achieve peace through Japan, ASEAN member countries, and the international community. Japan put the commitment with the key role in finding peace for Cambodia, as mentioned above, and like Mr. Yasushi Akashi, former United Nations Undersecretary General, said "Patience and Hope: My Experiences from Cam-

bodia Peacekeeping Cooperation (PKO),” [9]. As noted, Cambodia is a small country with few diverse ethnic groups, and only three main political powers took control of Cambodia. So, the peace mediator can easily negotiate with the conflict leaders to reach an agreement. Most significantly, even though the war end, Japan still monitors and assists Cambodia with managing the country because Japan is afraid that Cambodia can fall into the war again or repeat its history. Together, in the domestic context, Cambodia itself was in need of peace and welcomed the foreign countries that wished to build pace for Cambodia. [10] As Sadako Ogata said “Peaceful society can’t develop on its own and it must be created by the continuous efforts of the people themselves”. Moreover, the win-win policy also contributed to the pace building of Cambodia.

### Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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