

Review of Trevor Findlay, *Cambodia the Legacy and Lessons of UNTAC*, Stockholm: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute and Oxford University Press. 1995; and Timothy Carney and Tan Lian Choo, *Whither Cambodia? Beyond the Election*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1993, in *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (September 1995), pp. 439-443.

**[\*...\*] indicates additions not in published version**

**Cambodia the Legacy and Lessons of UNTAC.** By Trevor Findlay. Stockholm: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute and Oxford University Press. 1995. pp. 238.

**Whither Cambodia? Beyond the Election.** By Timothy Carney and Tan Lian Choo. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies. 1993. pp. 52.

Trevor Findlay has written a detailed research report on the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) and the election there in May 1993, based on impressive documentation, official, academic, and journalistic, plus interviews with many important UNTAC personnel, with all sources carefully noted. It is a good guide for students studying the Cambodian case, both the election period, and the background negotiations. It lacks, however, any touch of presence on the scene, and indeed Findlay does not have a Cambodia background and claims only a one-week field trip to the country during the election.

Timothy Carney on the other hand is both a scholar of Cambodia with experience as a United States diplomat in Cambodian affairs, and was director of an important UNTAC component, 'UNTAC 12', for Information and Education. Thus his part of **Whither Cambodia?** is the personal memoir of someone at the center of things. Presumably Tan Lian Choo, a Singapore journalist, was also in Cambodia during the election, although this is not explicit. Neither is the occasion nor the date, inferentially July or August 1993, of the panel discussion from which the book derived. There is no editor's introduction to Carney's presentation, followed by that of Tan, followed by several questions from anonymous participants and answers by Carney and Tan.

Both books presuppose that the UNTAC operation was at least a "qualified success" (Findlay, p.103), although Carney and Tan (15, 28) warn of further dangers from a new Khmer Rouge initiative or from a coup by a discontented faction of the Phnom Penh Cambodian Peoples Party (CPP). The altruism of the complex international negotiations preceding UNTAC is

not questioned. Carney, with no sign of tongue-in-cheek starts (1), "[t]he international community as a whole and ASEAN in particular have paid in diplomatic and political capital, in dollars and in blood to effect a solution to the Cambodia problem...". It was not Cambodia which suffered for years because of isolation by the international community, but the latter who were victimized by those intractable Cambodians.

Although less blatant, Findlay shows similar tendencies. In his listing (19) of six reasons why the alternative, international support for the Phnom Penh government, was untenable, he does get close to the more cynical explanation that because of its close relationship with Vietnam, it had to be displaced, but this does not trouble him. He also asserts (23) that "[i]nstability in Phnom Penh was heightened by the political free-for-all which developed after the Hun Sen government announced in November [1991] that Cambodia would become a multi-party state", perhaps undercutting the international community by enacting reforms on its own which had been demanded for years, even allowing a 'political free-for-all', something usually considered a characteristic of democratic systems.

Similarly (24) he adopts the attitude of UNTAC Military Commander General Sanderson that the attempted coalition between the royalist party FUNCINPEC and the CPP in late 1991 was a "major infraction of the Paris Accords". Findlay admits that in "a functioning, established democracy such behaviour would not be frowned upon", but Cambodia was not to be permitted to engage in such democratic behaviour on its own. "It could have been disastrous", says Findlay, although giving no reason beyond "it would have antagonized the Khmer Rouge". Of course the international community, concerned with democracy, could not do that. Only the CPP was to be antagonized; and the feared disaster was obviously that with Sihanouk's support, the CPP might have secured a real victory in the election. [Findlay quaintly remarks (24) that "Sihanouk and Hun Sen shelved their plans for a coalition government by early December".]

Findlay uncritically accepts views slanted against Vietnam, citing Asia Watch (45) for the interpretation that "[t]hree centuries of political subjugation [by] and loss of territory...[to] Vietnam" account for Cambodian fear and hatred of that country. No blame is allotted to the anti-Vietnamese international propaganda in 1979-93, and to all modern Cambodian regimes, which with one exception, the Peoples Republic of Kampuchea/State of Cambodia (PRK/SOC) in Phnom Penh after 1979, incited Cambodians against Vietnam over territory lost more than 200 years ago and a mere decade of subjugation in the early nineteenth century (of course some also claim that 1979-1989 was Vietnamese subjugation, which

not all historians would accept). It was noteworthy after 1991 that some of the most strident anti-Vietnam activists in Phnom Penh were returned exiles who seemed to have learned their 'traditional' hatred of Vietnam in American universities.

In another context (102), perhaps with the intent to balance criticism of the Thai military for lack of cooperation, Findlay found it necessary to fault Vietnam for "permitting the illegal migration of Vietnamese into Cambodia...lured by the sudden boom conditions in Phnom Penh", where most of the housing construction made necessary by the UNTAC presence could not have been undertaken without those Vietnamese. Who is to say it was illegal? It was certainly welcomed by the Phnom Penh authorities.

There is no excuse for repetition of mere gossip, such as (Findlay, 140) the French, "pursuing national rather than UNTAC goals...tended to run...Kompong Som [province] as a French fiefdom rather than as part of a multinational operation", without the least hint of what is meant; and this was described by a "senior UNTAC officer" with monumental absurdity as "'treasonous'", all sourced to "Private communication" in Phnom Penh.

Deserving mention here is that the French in Kompong Som may have been able to operate without constant reference to UNTAC headquarters because they had their own Khmer language capability, which, as Findlay notes elsewhere (120, 123, 137), was lacking throughout most of UNTAC, in part because of a policy to refuse employment to Khmer experts who had shown sympathy to Phnom Penh. Those with a record of hostility toward Phnom Penh received an enthusiastic welcome. At the time the only complaints about the French in Kompong Som, except from Findlay's carefully disguised informant, came from the Khmer Rouge.

Both books raise doubts in their treatment of election violence for which the CPP in particular were accused. Findlay (60) cites journalist Nate Thayer, not any UNTAC source, for, "UNTAC investigators concluded that [Phnom Penh security forces]...were being used to 'try to reverse early opposition party successes'". Findlay also mentions the 'A-92' group, citing Asia Watch, and Carney (5) cites the existence of "an SOC police group... 'A92'", known from "a confidential memo of the Ministry of National Security". Peculiarly, Carney attributes the information to journalist Jacques Bekaert, not to any UNTAC source, although he could not have been unaware of the "roving Control Team" to check provincial administration, which allegedly found SOC documents indicating "persistent use of the SOC state apparatus to conduct political campaign activities" (Findlay 62). The confidential memo cited by Carney, however, indicated "a plan to 'win the trust of the opposition parties'", to forestall their activities,

while Findlay merely says the task of A-92 was, "infiltrate opposition parties to create internal dissension and disruption". Moreover (60) a "secret UNTAC report" found that the CPP had directed those groups "to curb excesses of violence". None of this adds up to planned SOC violence against the opposition, and this is the worst that either Findlay or Carney cite.

Both Findlay and Carney neglect to mention that after the election the two SOC leaders whom 'UNTAC sources' and journalists had blamed for organising the violence [Sar Kheng and Sin Song] were invited to the US.

While Carney's coyness may have been to avoid embarrassment, Findlay's reflects lack of familiarity with the details, for he does show some awareness of the problem.

In one case he realized that Nate Thayer's source for a negative appraisal of UNTAC's impression on Cambodians "may have exaggerated...and...may have represented the view of only one part of UNTAC" (47), almost certainly UNTAC 12, for whose special views Nate Thayer was often a willing conduit, citing 'confidential UN reports'.

In another case (51), Findlay was stung, following a February 1994 article by Thayer ("Shakeup in KR hierarchy", *Phnom Penh Post*, 3/2 28 Jan-10 Feb 1994) who reported that in May 1992 there had been a Khmer Rouge leadership shakeup in which seven new strong leaders had emerged, while Son Sen was sacked as "KR Commander-in-Chief and Defense Minister and his membership of the party's standing committee was terminated after he argued in favor of entering into Phase II of the Accords". In spite of this Findlay did not find it odd that Son Sen was still KR representative in the four-party Supreme National Council in January 1993 (58). [See Vickery, "Son Sen and all that--challenging the KR pundits", *Phnom Penh Post*, vol. 5, no. 24, 29 November-12 December, 1996, p. 7.

This two-year late, and inaccurate, revelation by Thayer, whose text implied that he had received his information from Carney's deputy Stephen Heder, may have been because some observers had questioned the accuracy, and journalists' neglect, of Akashi's alarming announcement, in May 1993, that the KR were stronger than before; a great risk to the elections, with military strength increased by at least 50 per cent, new weapons, larger units, and leaders more extreme than in past years (*The Nation*, Bangkok, 20 May). That was untrue, as was known to Akashi's Cambodia experts, including Heder, who revealed the true situation in "What lies behind KR's moves", *Phnom Penh Post*, 3/10, 20 May-2 June 1994. Carney has ignored this and Findlay (106, n. 13) garbled it by taking 15,000 troops, Heder's retrospective low figure, as the total after the alleged 50 percent increase. In May 1993 that figure would not have alarmed anyone. Western estimates had been

around 30,000, and a 50 per cent increase would have meant 45,000.

One might wonder whether Akashi's later complaint about "'somewhat superficial military information' he received" (Findlay, 141) was related to this. Just a month after Heder's revelation Thayer, in "Split formalized as KR declare 'govt'", *Phnom Penh Post*, 3/14, 15-28 July 1994, attempted to save his phenomena by asserting that the KR shakeup and Son Sen's removal had been after June **1993**, although by this time there could have been no question of a KR dispute over Phase II, nor threat to the election.

Findlay, probably in ignorance, slides over another unclear event, the secession of several eastern provinces under Prince Chakrapong right after the election (91), and again promotes Thayer as an independent authority, repeating his assertion that "Akashi was criticized for remaining silent" and for appreciating the efforts of Hun Sen, again by Thayer's favorite UNTAC 'analysts'.<sup>1</sup>

Carney, who was on the scene, has treated the secession in more detail, but misleadingly, saying (8) it was "widely viewed as more of theater than of reality". At the time Carney's UNTAC 12 took it very seriously indeed. Carney continues (12), "[m]any CPP activists resigned seats just before the Constituent Assembly met, to be replaced by party technocrats lower on the candidate lists... [and] [a]nalyses differ on whether the CPP thereby showed its serious interest to use expertise to participate fully in national political life, or whether the CPP was keeping an option open for parallel, even clandestine, party activities to preserve options in the countryside".

What Carney avoids is that the resignations occurred before, and seemed to set off, the secession, and that one of the analyses, the latter, was by Carney's deputy Stephen Heder, distributed via Carney as an official, confidential, UNTAC analysis to only the nine highest UNTAC officials. In his note 11 he acknowledges that the counter-analysis favorable to the CPP was by Michael Vickery, but uses the device of citing journalists to make it appear that the disagreement was Nate Thayer "versus" Vickery, or quoting the *Nation* (Bangkok), "disagreement between Vickery and an [unnamed] UNTAC analyst and academic who take opposing viewpoints on the issue".<sup>2</sup> Carney's shifty footwork serves to distance himself from, and implicitly

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<sup>1</sup>. See Nate Thayer, "Sihanouk Back at the Helm", *Phnom Penh Post*, Vol. 2, Number 13, 18 June-1 July 1993, and "Surface Calm, Power-sharing pact brings little change", *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 8 July 1993.

<sup>2</sup>. Michael Vickery, "Cambodia: A Political Survey", Discussion Paper Series, Number 14, Department of Political and Social Change, Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University, 1994.

disavow, Heder's and his own analysis which could have seriously misled UNTAC had it not immediately been leaked and subjected to independent dissection.

Both books illustrate a problem in writing to date about UNTAC Cambodia, the planting of 'confidential documents' on compliant, or innocent, journalists and researchers by UNTAC officials promoting their personal views as UN policy. The examples noted here suggest that technique of manipulation may have been used internally as well.