

# Was UNTAC's mission in Cambodia a success or a failure?

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Cambodia will celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Paris Peace Agreement (PPA) on October 23, 2021. Many foreign embassies in Cambodia are enthusiastic about commemorating the 30th anniversary. The Cambodian government will also commemorate the 30th anniversary of the Paris Peace Agreement, despite the fact that it was removed from the government's list of national holidays.

Despite the fact that the treaty has been in force for thirty years, scholars around the world and the Cambodian government continue to interpret it differently. The Cambodian government believes that the main meaning of the PPA has already been incorporated into Cambodia's constitution, and that it is no longer necessary to follow everything in the PPA except the constitution.

In this case, a question that has been raised frequently in Cambodia is whether UNTAC succeeded or failed in its mission in Cambodia.

In terms of its mandate, the resources allotted to it, and the challenges it faced, UNTAC can be considered a qualified success. The organisation and conduct of the election (which was free and fair, though the election campaign was not), the refugee repatriation program, and the promotion (but not protection) of human rights were all clear victories. Special mention should be made of UNTAC's Electoral Component and UNHCR as examples of what the UN can accomplish with adequate resources and planning. In particular, the Electoral Component should serve as a model for future UN electoral missions.

The majority of UNTAC's other



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responsibilities were successfully completed. It confirmed the Vietnamese withdrawal, assuaging Chinese and American concerns. It cantoned and disarmed the military forces it was granted access to. It started the rebuilding of Cambodia's infrastructure, administration, and economy. It employed 50,000 Cambodians, who gained valuable skills that can be put to use in the reconstruction and development of the country.

On a more fundamental level, UNTAC established the foundations of a civil society, leaving Cambodia with a more open political process, a freer press, and a more politically aware population than when it arrived. It left a democratically elected legislature and a coalition government of the country's three most popular political parties in place of an unelected regime imposed on the country by a foreign power.

In terms of UNTAC's overall

performance, key elements of the operation demonstrated creativity and flexibility at critical times, demonstrating the positive side of the improvisation that has characterized UN peacekeeping operations since their inception. When problems arose, the UNHCR changed its repatriation plan. With the approval of the Security Council, UNTAC effectively amended the Paris Accords by holding the election without the required 70% disarmament and cantonment. When cantonment and disarmament did not occur, the pattern of military deployments was changed to allow the Military Component to protect the electoral process and enhance security throughout the country. UNTAC also avoided some of the previous and concurrent peacekeeping operations' failures. It largely maintained its impartiality, suffered no catastrophic administrative disasters, and came in under budget by avoiding a shooting war

with a recalcitrant party, using force only in self-defense and even then with great restraint, and using force only in self-defense and even then with great restraint.

The deinternationalisation of the Cambodian conflict, another unspoken strategic goal of the Paris Accords, was also achieved. Chinese disengagement was aided in part by UNTAC's refusal to engage in armed conflict with the Khmer Rouge and because it acted impartially enough to maintain and even increase Chinese support for the peace process. Cambodia's neighbors, including China, will continue to be interested in its internal affairs, and some, like Thailand and Vietnam, will continue to interfere, but UNTAC successfully resolved a long-standing international dispute over Cambodia's UN seat. For the first time since the 1970s, it aided in the installation of an internationally recognized and recognizable

Cambodian government, paving the way for Cambodia to reclaim its rightful place in a number of international organizations, including ASEAN and the newly established ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF).

The Paris Accords, on the other hand, were undeniably unsuccessful in bringing peace to Cambodia. The responsibility for this situation falls squarely on UNTAC's shoulders. Its major failures in implementing the Accords were:

Its inability to control and supervise the State of Cambodia (SOC) Administration;

Its unwillingness to deal forcefully with human rights violations, particularly because it has refused to establish a system of justice to deal with the most egregious of these;

Its management failures, including poor inter-component coordination and cooperation.

The following aspects of UNTAC's performance were not entirely within its control but could have been improved: (1) the lateness of its deployment and installation; (2) its strategic planning; (3) the poor performance of its Civilian Police (CivPols); (4) the initial neglect of the adverse economic effects of its own presence; and (4) the slowness of its rehabilitation and de-mining programs. It's worth noting that UNTAC's greatest successes came in areas where it had the most independent control and latitude, i.e., areas where it didn't need the full cooperation of all factions to be effective. Its major setbacks occurred in areas where it was subjected to the whims of its Cambodian peace partners. ■

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## Prudence required to minimise infection chain

AS of Tuesday noon, the National Health Commission registered nine newly identified local COVID-19 infections nationwide.

The number itself may not be anything to worry about. Considering all the cases may be associated with a group of eight tourists, all of whom have been confirmed COVID-19 positive, however, it is not groundless to worry that a longer, complex chain of infections may emerge in the days to come.

Since it remains a mystery where and how the first two victims in the group, an elderly couple from Shanghai, became infected, and they

have traveled thousands of miles from the coastal metropolis of Shanghai to a number of north-western localities, most of which are popular tourist attractions, the chain of infections could be difficult to trace and control.

The latest data indicate that dozens of people have been infected, and they are in Beijing, and Gansu, Guizhou, Hunan and Shaanxi provinces, and the Ningxia Hui and Inner Mongolia autonomous regions.

To contain the situation, regional lockdowns have already been ordered, and large-scale screening is underway in multiple places,

including Beijing. Some residential neighborhoods and public venues have been put under quarantine and tourist attractions have been closed.

In the city of Jiayuguan, Gansu province, local bus services have been suspended. In several other places, inter-regional public transport has been halted.

It is thought that the initial infections may have been in Erenhot, Inner Mongolia, which is adjacent to a part of Mongolia where the pandemic situation is reportedly serious. But as of now, that has not been confirmed.

If that indeed was the case, it

would raise questions about potential local community transmission, which would make things even more complicated. Equally troubling is the fact that the infected group of eight has traveled long distances across provinces, sometimes using public transport, including protracted train trips, and visited many crowded tourist sites and public venues. Tracking their contacts even after diagnosis will be an extremely challenging task.

The National Health Commission and National Bureau of Disease Control and Prevention have sent teams to Gansu, Inner Mongolia, Ningxia and Shaanxi to

guide the local epidemic prevention and control work.

This new outbreak spread by a group of tourists, along with the sub-cluster identified in the Nanjing-related chain of infections spanning July and August, should once again remind people of the lingering risks of cross-region travel, and highlight the importance of balancing economic development with epidemic control.

While boosting tourism, which is an indispensable part of consumer spending, to drive the economy, there is a need for sustained vigilance for pandemic control. *Global Times* ■