

opening chapter, are not given sufficient in-depth treatment, with the exception of the chapters on India and Pakistan.

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Editor's Note: It is with great sadness that Professor Michael Leifer passed away on 23 March 2001 (see "In Memoriam," p. iv).

***Exiting Indochina: U.S. Leadership of the Cambodia Settlement and Normalization with Vietnam.* By Richard H. Solomon.** Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2000. 116pp.

If Cambodia's precarious "peace" were represented in a *mandala*, the reader might see concentric circles depicting the fratricidal factions of the Khmer state, *all* the major world powers, and the regional players — ASEAN, Australia and Japan. In this picture, the artifacts of Khmer culture and history must jostle with unexploded ordnance, land mines, and all the unfortunate legacies of a bitter war that continue to take a toll on human life and limb.

The enormity of Cambodia's misfortune invites such mythic imagery. Although Cambodia was often seen largely as a sideshow in the larger Indochina conflict, in important ways it became the ultimate barometer for the tragedy of war in the region. Nearly a decade has passed since the "peace" was made, yet a final reckoning for the "killing fields" still has not and may never come. At the time of writing, the United Nations is still negotiating with Cambodian authorities over setting up what essentially would be a war crimes tribunal. Prime Minister Hun Sen — erstwhile Khmer Rouge partisan and later renegade — has long sought to restrict the powers of any such future court by insisting on local judges. Despite the tendency to historical amnesia, however, Cambodia today is arguably a functional state. It has joined ASEAN, together with Vietnam and Laos, and the Khmer Rouge has virtually disintegrated. Thus, setting aside any distaste for Hun Sen's *coup d'état* in 1997, it could be argued that Cambodia has been substantially rehabilitated.

Historically, the years 1989–91 figured prominently in that rehabilitation. At that time, the Cold War's hastening thaw lent momentum to international mediation efforts then under way, resulting in a comprehensive settlement that eventually restored Cambodian nationhood. That story may be gleaned through various sources, but

those wishing a brief and handy retrospective — especially from the U.S. viewpoint — can appreciate this new book by one of the central architects of that peace settlement.

Richard H. Solomon's *Exiting Indochina* presents us not Cambodia *per se*, but rather some lessons for the statesman-bureaucrat in the making of Cambodia's "peace". Solomon crafts his extended essay in a decidedly plainspoken American manner. Quite brief at just over a hundred pages, the book seems at times almost clinical, even antiseptic. It grew out of an earlier "assessment" published by the U.S. Institute of Peace (of which Solomon has been president since 1993) "as a vehicle for teaching and training practitioners in ... international mediation" (p. xvi).

Exiting Indochina sets out to describe "the U.S. role as one among several players in constructing a peace process for Cambodia" (p. 7). As an Assistant Secretary of State during those years, Solomon led the U.S. team that helped to forge the necessary *entente* among the major powers and hammer out the basic framework for the peace agreement. The book aims at "placing the Bush administration's diplomacy in the complex historical and political context of Indochina, the last years of the Cold War, and American domestic politics" (p. 7). Additionally, according to Stanley Karnow (in the Foreword to the book), it tells the story of how U.S. strategy on Cambodia shifted from its initially narrow focus of thwarting perceived Vietnamese strategic designs in the region to "constructing an exit from Indochina for all the major powers" once and for all (p. ix). Eschewing both academic jargon and journalistic flourish, Solomon's plainspoken style contrasts oddly with this breathtaking agenda. He also glosses over many points in order to deliver a leaner, admittedly subjective, narrative. Many readers will already be familiar with the diplomatic events recounted by Solomon. What sets the book apart is its emphasis on details more germane to the shape and direction of U.S. policy.

Solomon depicts the Indochina wars as "surrogate conflicts of the Cold War era" (p. xiii). One of the book's premises is that the Cambodia peace process succeeded because it happened at a moment in history when such conflicts became anachronistic, because the end of the Cold War provided a context in which "military confrontations and war gave way ... to an era of political management of international conflicts" (p. xvi). The author briefly discusses how this systemic shift readjusted the political motivations of the partisans at the global, regional, and local levels. This readjustment set the stage for crucial compromises and enabled the diplomatic solution.

Solomon identifies five phases in the peace negotiations: the ASEAN-led talks throughout the 1980s; the Paris talks facilitated by France and Indonesia in early to mid-1989; the U.S.-led U.N. Security

Council (“Perm Five”) initiative beginning in the fall of 1989; the Paris conferences from late 1990 until late 1991; and the implementation under the U.N. Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) beginning in early 1992. The Australian initiative following the deadlock of the earlier Paris talks receives no mention in this short list, although Solomon discusses it elsewhere in the book.

The early Paris talks had foundered on the key question of transitional power-sharing among the Cambodian factions, particularly the extent of Khmer Rouge participation. The United States decided at that point to initiate a diplomatic offensive through the U.N. Security Council. Charged with launching this new U.S. effort, Solomon directed the U.S. team to find a way of “building on the results of the Paris Conference through a UN-centered initiative” (p. 34). Owing to improving U.S.–Soviet and Sino-Soviet relations at that time, the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council managed to agree on the framework for a comprehensive settlement. The greater challenge lay in marshalling support for the plan from regional players and, “above all, developing domestic [U.S.] political backing...” (p. 37). The difficulties in mobilizing U.S. domestic political support arose from the public controversy surrounding the Administration’s hardline stance towards Vietnam and the tacit support it appeared to be giving the Khmer Rouge. Solomon subscribes to Kissinger’s notion that U.S. foreign policy was caught in tension between humanitarian idealism and *realpolitik*, and he considers the pressures from the U.S. Congress and the media in this light. Congressional members, concerned about military co-operation between the Khmer Rouge and the non-communist resistance (NCR), threatened to end assistance to the latter and eventually compelled an adjustment in U.S. policy on Cambodia.

Solomon explains that the success of the Permanent Five initiative nudged the Bush Administration away from its preferred reliance on ASEAN’s lead towards a higher-profile and leading role. It created within the Administration “a certain measure of paternity and vested interest” in a U.N. plan. Moreover, the plan quickly “acquired a momentum and authority that proved difficult for governments with other ideas and other interests either to resist or subvert” (p. 50). The thaw in U.S.–Soviet relations was also an important factor. Following a meeting between Baker and Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze in July 1990, the United States withdrew support for the NCR’s claim to Cambodia’s U.N. seat and began direct consultations with Vietnam. This move came as a shock to ASEAN, and apparently broke much of the NCR intransigence that had long held up progress on the peace plan.

Solomon believes that the U.S. assertion of leadership was crucial in moving the peace initiative to the United Nations and creating a U.N.-centred resolution. The U.N. approach would ensure a workable and comprehensive settlement because it provided “a screen behind which the Chinese, Russians, and Vietnamese privately worked out a resolution of their differences over the future of Indochina” (p. 6). Enhancing U.N. involvement to include peacekeeping was also politically important to preventing the Khmer Rouge’s return to power. Additionally, it would “subject the [Hun Sen] regime’s political legitimacy to the test of Cambodian public opinion” (p. 36).

Solomon believes the unfolding Sino–Soviet and Sino–Vietnamese *entente* were key to producing the Permanent Five consensus behind the U.N. peace plan. Integral to this consensus was an understanding that all powers cease military support on the ground, thus compelling the Khmer factions to bring their bitter disputes “from the killing fields to the UN-managed political process” (p. 78).

Exiting Indochina is neither an academic treatise nor journalistic reportage, and was not intended as a memoir. In the end, it is a curiously light treatment from someone with such intimate knowledge of a rather difficult story. What the reader might expect from such a book is not an exhaustive accounting of the Cambodia settlement process; the more comprehensive studies of that process are to be found elsewhere. Nor should the reader expect a non-subjective treatment, notwithstanding Solomon’s portrayal of the U.S. role as a non-partisan mediator. Readers know that accounts of diplomatic history written by the officials involved are to be taken with a grain of salt, for the question that always lingers is to what extent such accounts might be motivated by a desire to guard political legacies. What the reader hopes to get are an insider’s version that helps humanize that history, some craft and colour in the telling of anecdotes, and some passion in the arguments presented. In this regard, Solomon could have departed somewhat from the level-headed tone he so persistently employs in his story. Given the subject matter, some readers may find Solomon’s narrative to be overly dry and restrained. Finally, towards the end, the book evokes a subtle but discernible tone of self-redemption over the larger U.S. role in Indochina. Solomon believes that through its peace effort in Cambodia the “U.S. attained a constructive exit [from] one of the most bitter and costly conflicts of the Cold War and a successful venture in international diplomacy” (p. 98). Thus might history be unburdened.

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