

Peacebuilding and Development Implications of Cambodia's Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding Operation

Journal of Peacebuilding
& Development

1-6

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DOI: 10.1177/1542316619867632

journals.sagepub.com/home/jpd

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Keywords

peacebuilding, peacekeepers, post-conflict country, Cambodia, sustainable peace

The effective transition from peacekeeping to peacebuilding is the backbone for achieving sustainable peace. There has been an increasing participation and interest from developing and post-conflict countries to contribute troops and personnel in United Nations (UN) Peacekeeping Operations (UNPKO). Cambodia has contributed its troops to join UN peacekeeping since 2006.

Cambodia's Experience as a Host Country

UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC)

The UNTAC was established in 1991 to rebuild Cambodia and arrange a national election (Article 2&3 Paris Peace Agreement, 1991). The presence of UNTAC was welcomed by the local population, as they believed that UNTAC would help to bring long-lasting peace (Lizee, 2000). The most serious weakness of UNTAC was the military, which failed to deal with the issue of the Khmer Rouge withdrawing from the peace process and the consequences of their early departure (Lizee, 2000, p. 142).

The Khmer Rouge withdrawal was resolved by the win-win policy of the current government

(Sokveng, 2008). UNTAC exercised its powers to ensure the implementation of the peace agreement including the organisation and conduct of national elections and other relevant aspects of the administration of Cambodia (Article 6 Paris Peace Agreement, 1991). Its mandate, from February 1992 to September 1993, included aspects relating to human rights, the organisation and conduct of elections, military arrangements, civil administration, maintenance of law and order, repatriation and resettlement of refugees, and displaced persons and rehabilitation of Cambodian infrastructure (UNPKO, 1992–1993).

There were 45 states that participated in the mission consisting of military and civilian police personnel. The strength of the mission was the deployment of the personnel, in which there were 15,991 military contingents and 3,359 civilian police; during the electoral periods, more than 50,000 Cambodians served as electoral staff alongside 900 international polling station officers (UNPKO). An outstanding success of

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UNTAC was the assistance in organisation of the first national election in which it was transferred the experiences and skill to local people engaged during the electoral period.

Cambodia as a Contributing State

Initially a recipient of the UN peacekeeping operation UNTAC in 1993 and now as a post-conflict and developing country, Cambodia has contributed troops since 2006 to a number of different missions. This can be demonstrated that experiences and involvement in the works of UNTAC enriched to local personnel capacity. Upon the request from the UN peacekeeping, the National Coordination Committee (NCC) was established in 2005, a cooperation between the Ministry of National Defense and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to coordinate with the UN on the contribution of the peacekeepers. The National Center for Peacekeeping Forces, Mine, and Explosive Remnants of War Clearance (NPMEC) was also established. NCC and NPMEC have responsibility to provide training and logistical support for the deployment of Cambodian peacekeepers.

Since the dispatch of its first peacekeepers in 2006, by 2018, Cambodia had sent over 5,700 troops to participate in UN peacekeeping missions (Titthara, 2017). Cambodia had sent its troops (soldiers and gendarmeries) to the Republic of Sudan (UNMIS), Central African Republic and Chad (MINURCAT), Lebanon (UNIFIL), Cyprus (UNFICYP), South Sudan (UNMISS), Mali (MINUSMA), Central African Republic (MINUSCA), Darfur (UNAMID), and Abyei (UNIFA). The deployments had different mandates and missions such as engineering, construction, demining, medical, and military observer roles (Cambodian NCC, 2016; UNPKO, 2018). Cambodian peacekeeping forces were initially demining units and later expanded to engineering in construction units (Cambodian NCC, 2016, UNPKO, 2018). The ASEAN Regional Mine Action Center was established in 2016 with its headquarter based in Phnom Penh. Cambodia is recognised by UNPKO as having a commitment to meet the gender balance in troop contribution by recruiting female soldiers to join the UN

peacekeeping operations (Cambodian NCC, 2016). Currently, there are 301 contingent troops in MINUSMA mission; 200 contingent troops, six staff officers, and six experts in MINUSCA mission; 184 contingent troops in UNIFIL mission; 70 contingent troops and eight staff officers in UNMISS mission; one expert in UNAMID mission; and one Staff officers in UNISFA mission (UNPKO, 2019).

Rationale of Contributing Cambodian Troops

State interest, power, and political agendas are some of the motivators for states to contribute troops to peacekeeping duties (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute). Cambodia's rationales for contributing troops to peacekeeping missions are based on external and internal state policy, economic benefits, and normative motivation. The Cambodian government believes that sending troops to join UN peacekeeping will improve Cambodia's image and prestige on the international stage and enhance its soft power (Art, 2019) as well as consolidating the legitimacy of the government (Chheang, 2014). Sending Cambodian troops with equipment is a source of financial gain for both individual soldiers and the institution. The deployed troops receive the compensation and incentive offered by the UN in addition to their salary. Peacekeeping provides more training and capacity building for Cambodian troops with the support from donors. This is in addition to the experience that the troops gain whilst deployed abroad to fulfil their mission. Normative motivation is the promotion and maintenance of global peace and security through international cooperation, as a means for post-conflict countries to give back (Avezov, 2016, p. 159). Sending the troops evokes national pride in Cambodia's progress from a recipient of UN peacekeeping into a contributing state maintaining peace elsewhere.

The Deployment of Peacekeepers Decision-Making Process

Cambodian government policy on peacekeeping operations can be found in the Defense White Paper

(2006) published by Ministry of National Defense in 2006 and Cambodia's Defense Strategies Review in 2013 (Ministry of National Defense of Cambodia, 2013). The 2006 White Paper outlined aims to build the peacekeeping capacity of the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces and strengthening multilateral cooperation and defence policy (Chheang, 2014). The decision to deploy Cambodian peacekeeping troops rests with the Cambodian government. The government assesses its capacity to deploy the troops once there is a request from UN peacekeeping. The NCC examines the request and makes a recommendation to the prime minister for his review and approval (Cambodian NCC, 2016).

The Challenges Facing Cambodia as a Contributing State

The challenges that Cambodian peacekeepers encounter are different and vary according to their mandate and mission. The most challenging encounter was the first time Cambodian troops were sent to join a UN peacekeeping operation. It required preparation, and it takes time to understand the engagement with the UN system (Cambodian NCC, 2016). A delay in transferring incentives and compensation for the equipment was an issue. The Cambodian government had to adjust their budget for the payment to the Cambodian soldiers to ensure that the payment to their troops was on time.

Compensation with regards to the incidents continues to be an issue for ongoing negotiation. Several incidents have taken Cambodian soldiers' lives and caused injuries whilst carrying out missions. The most recent was in 2018, four Cambodian peacekeepers were injured during their mission in Mali (*Phnom Penh Post*, 2018).

A burden is placed on contributing states to ensure that their commitment to send troops meet the UN standards and is compliant with the law. They must be able to fulfil the mission. It requires contributing states to take initiative to enhance and train their troops as required by UN based on case by case (Department of Peacekeeping Operations and Department of Field Support, 2010).

The ability to speak a foreign language is one difficulty when recruiting peacekeeping troops (Cambodian NCC, 2016). It is a challenge for Cambodia to provide the qualified troops who have the ability to communicate in English or other foreign languages. Further, the troops' ability to understand the legal framework and instruments and other guidelines and disciplines of the UN needs improvement (Cambodian NCC, 2016).

The safety of Cambodian troops is the government priority. An integrated mission imposes a greater risk to the life of personnel (UNPKO, 2008). The shifting nature of armed conflict from interstate to intrastate creates new challenge to peacekeeping operations (UNPKO, 2008). An additional challenge is that Cambodia has limited access to needed equipment for peacekeeping missions; therefore, it is necessary to seek supply from other countries. Despite the challenges, the Cambodia government remains fully committed to providing troops to UN peacekeeping missions as it aspires to enhance the capacity and qualification of its troops and render efficient services for peace and humanitarian assistance (Cambodian NCC, 2016).

The Training, Qualifications, and Capacity of Cambodian Peacekeepers

Peacekeepers shall be able to demonstrate their "professional, dedication and self-restraint" (UNPKO, 2008) to contribute to the success mission of the UN. There is, however, concern that due to lack of personnel, the UN take whatever they are offered. To establish training standards for contributing states, it is necessary to create better terms and conditions to attract qualified and experienced personnel (Alex & Paul, 2013).

Cambodia has sent the personnel, soldiers, and gendarmeries to join the Status of Forces Agreement. Moreover, there are individuals who participate in the Status of Mission Agreement through other UN agencies to support the peacekeeping mission. The recruitment of Cambodian peacekeepers is challenging and competitive. Recruitment opportunities are open to all the

Cambodian armed forces. The internal forces are recruited from NPMEC as the core contributing forces, and the external forces can be recruited elsewhere including the soldiers from the provinces.

The NCC works with the NPMEC responsible for predeployment training, logistic preparation, and other tasks. NPMEC is mainly responsible for providing training to peacekeepers and builds their capacity to contribute more effectively. The period of intensive training before deploying to fulfil their mission takes from 6 months to 1 year. In addition to the Cambodian training, there is training that is supported by donor countries such as Japan, Australia, France, America, India, and China. The support is provided through sending their legal consultants, experts, and technical advisors and trainers in engineering, military observation, and theoretical training on the relevant applicable laws that apply to UN peacekeeping forces.

Challenges and Commitment of Peacekeepers

The demining Cambodian team is expert in mine clearance, but they lack of experience when they fulfil their job during armed conflict (Cambodian NCC, 2016). Communication in a different language is a challenge. The language barrier may contribute to the poor communication and insufficient information. This may lead to difficulties for troops from different countries in carrying out operations effectively. The understanding, trust, and support are important when it comes to communication with the local people of the hosting country. Culture differences require the forces to be well prepared and learn to understand and adapt to new living environment. Disease transmission is an issue; particularly, malaria and diarrhoea are easily transmitted. It can be difficult and costly for peacekeepers to communicate with family back home. The complexity of the mission in term of structure, mission, mandate, and different contributing forces may undermine the efficiency of the cooperation. In some situations, there has been uncertainty whether UN or the contributing states have command of the contributing troops.

Despite the challenges and difficulties that peacekeepers encounter, there are numerous reasons to inspire and motivate Cambodian peacekeepers to join the peace missions. Being part of the mission allows them to apply practical experience. Multi-dimensional peace operations and contributing troops from different countries provide the opportunity for the Cambodian troops to work, share, and learn from other countries both technically and strategically. Such experiences may help to reform the domestic strategies once they return back and continue to serve the nation and the people. Cambodian peacekeepers are motivated and committed to serve for the cause of peace to bring honour to the nation and the people. Cambodia is not different from other developing countries that send their forces to join the UN peacekeeping mission; they receive better incentive as well as compensation to support their families. The contributing troops from Cambodia receive approximately US\$1,000 or more in addition to their salary. They are also more likely to be promoted upon their return.

Key Messages for Consideration

There is a real commitment by troops from post-conflict countries who were recipients of the UN peacekeeping missions such as Cambodia to keep and build peace elsewhere. The lessons learnt from Cambodia's experience, first, peacekeeping and peacebuilding operation must be concurrently implemented, significantly during the transition period from one to another to ensure that the state has ability to take ownership continuing keeping and building long last peace in their country. Second, peacekeeping operations should be a role model for the hosting countries not only their competency and professions but also the value of doing the task. Being an influencer, the recipient country to appreciate and commit to help others in return. Third, during the peace operation should focus on empowerment the local forces ranging from country leaders, armed forces, and civilian personnel to ensure that when UN peacekeeping forces withdraw, they can help themselves and support one another. Fourth, continuing the support of contributing states from post-conflict countries by providing training inside and outside the

country to ensure the competent and qualification of contributing troops. Finally, regulations or written policies should be developed to regulate the deployment of peacekeepers to ensure the long-term effective contribution.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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