

# **CHAPTER 1**

---

## **Cambodian Security and Defence Policy**

*Vannarith Chheang*

### **Introduction**

The key security challenges for Cambodia in 2012 and early 2013 mainly derive from external sources, factors, and actors. Those challenges include the increasing uncertainty and unpredictability of regional security environments stemming especially from the increasing perceived strategic competition and structural conflicts between major powers, sovereignty and territorial disputes, increasing nationalism and strategic assertiveness in some countries, and the rapid defense modernization especially in sea-power projection. Such defensive development will only create more strategic distrust if transparency and good intentions are not there. It even can lead to militarism in some countries if there is no strong culture of security sector governance and reform.

In response to the fast changing national, regional, and global security environment, Cambodian security and defense priorities have also been continuously redefined and revised. The current security and defense policies focus on border defense, natural disasters response, maritime security, Mekong River water resource security, counter terrorism and international crimes capabilities, and security sector reform and governance. For defense diplomacy and international cooperation, Cambodia emphasizes increasing its role in peacekeeping operations, the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, promoting cooperative security, and strengthening ASEAN centrality and capacity in shaping regional security architecture.

### **Regional environment**

As a new Asia Pacific order is under construction but without clear direction or leadership, regional countries, to a large extent, are faced with a strategic dilemma. Cambodia, like other countries, is challenged by such emerging realities and a zigzagging strategic trajectory. Moreover, Cambodia is faced with the increasing complexity and trans-boundary impacts of non-traditional security issues such

as natural disasters, climate change and food security, water resources security, terrorism, pandemic diseases, and human trafficking. As far as traditional security is concerned, the border dispute between Cambodia and Thailand remains the top defense and security policy agenda, although there has been significant process in improving bilateral relationships and mutual respect. To address those challenges, Cambodia tries to strengthen its capacity and promote both cooperative relationships and comprehensive win-win partnerships with its neighbors.

## **Border Defense**

Cambodia has opted to strengthen its defensive capabilities to protect its borders, especially through the sustainable presence of security forces at all strategically important points. Cambodia adheres to restraint and acts of self-defense, along with the concept of defending its border with diplomacy and peaceful negotiation. The Royal Cambodian Armed Forces (RCAF) continues to strengthen its border defense strategy, employ a flexible and controlled response, and contribute to developing local communities living along the border areas. In the last few years, different development projects have been conducted along the border area such as road construction and house building for the families of soldiers posted to the border areas.

Cambodia brought the case to the 18th ASEAN Summit in 2011 in Jakarta, Indonesia, in order to inform and invite ASEAN to intervene in the border conflict between its two member states. Then in April of the same year, Cambodia brought the case to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for the interpretation and clarification of the ICJ's judgment in 1962 over the *Preah Vihear* Temple and its surrounding areas, particularly with regards to the disputed 4.6 square kilometers occupied by Cambodia and claimed by Thailand. As a result, both Cambodia and Thailand were ordered to implement the ICJ Rules on Cambodia-Thailand disputes on July 19 2011 to refrain from engaging in further fighting in the area, immediately withdraw all troops, and establish a demilitarized zone of approximately 4.5 miles by 2.5 miles along the border. Observers from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations were also allowed into the demilitarized zone. On April 15-19, 2013, both Thailand and Cambodia will give their final verbal statements before the final court decision, which normally takes about six months.

The landslide victory of the *Peu Thai Party* in the 2011 election paved the way for Yingluck Shinawatra, younger sister of Thaksin Shinawatra, to come to power as the first female Thai Prime Minister in July of that year. This was a turning point for bilateral relations. In December 2011, Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen told the visiting Thai foreign minister Surapong Tovichakchaikul and energy minister Pichai Naripraphan that bilateral relations between Cambodia and Thailand have “turned good” since the *Peu Thai* Party led by Yingluck Shinawatra won the general election. He added that it was the opening of a new chapter in Cambodian and Thai relations and cooperation. Much progresses has been made in strengthening bilateral relationships in 2012. Trust had been restored and strengthened. Political, economic, and cultural relations have been remarkably improved. In the latest bilateral meeting between the two countries on December 26, 2012, both sides agreed to the opening of permanent checkpoints at *Sa Kaeo* province’s border, which would link Cambodia’s *Banteay Meanchey* province via the development of Route 48 from Thailand’s western *Trat* province to Cambodia’s *Sihanoukville* province, and a railway extension from the *Aranyaprathet* checkpoint on Thailand’s eastern border into Cambodia. In addition, the two nations also agreed to increase joint efforts in curbing human trafficking and illegal logging of rosewood along the border, and signed a memorandum of understanding on single visas under the Ayeyawady-Chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy (ACMECS).

However, the upcoming ICJ decision could be a potential challenge for both countries. Thailand expressed its concern over the court’s forthcoming decision. Thai Foreign Minister *Surapong Tovichakchaikul* stated, on January 2 2013, that: “Every country has to accept the ICJ’s decision. Refusal to accept it may put Thailand in a difficult position in the world arena. It is necessary to explain to the Thai people what the previous government had done that led Cambodia to raise the dispute in the ICJ . . . We have to accept the decision. Some people will not understand it though.”<sup>1</sup> Cambodia understands that the final decision of the ICJ on reinterpretation of the court’s judgment in the 1962 case of *Preah Vihear* Temple and its surrounding areas, would create a window of opportunity for the ultra-nationalist group in Thailand to stir tension against the current ruling party and Cambodia. To prevent that from

---

<sup>1</sup> *Pattaya Mail*, 2 January 2013, <http://www.pattayamail.com/news/thai-foreign-minister-anxious-about-cambodian-border-temple-conflict-20109>, accessed on January 4, 2013.

happening, any decision made by the court should be interpreted as a win-win for both sides, and for long-term friendship and peace between the two countries and peoples.

To prevent future potential conflict between the two armed forces, the defense leaders from both countries met at the end of February 2013 to send clear signals to each other. Both sides reaffirmed their position to peacefully solve the issues, and expressed their commitment to comply with the decision of the International Court of Justice. The Cambodian Defence Minister reiterated that: “no matter how the world court’s verdict comes out, we are neighbors and should not fight each other . . . We can [solve problems through] talks. We are supposed to be close friends as both of us are heading for the ASEAN Economic Community.”<sup>2</sup>

Although the bilateral relationship between Cambodia and Thailand has significantly improved since July 2011, uncertainties remain. As the power struggle and polarized party politics in Thailand continue, the upcoming ICJ’s decision can potentially seriously challenge the status quo of the current domestic political atmosphere in Bangkok. The relations between the military and the ruling party are still distant. Civil-military relations are not going so smoothly. Due to such remaining uncertainties and challenges along the border area with Thailand, the Cambodian government decided to increase defense budget by 14 percent in 2013 (US\$400.16 million) as compared with 2012 (US\$350 million). The budget is mainly used to purchase new weapons and training for self-defense. In November 2012, hundreds of tanks and armed personnel vehicles were shipped to Cambodia though *Sihanouk Ville* port from Eastern Europe in order to strengthen national defense capacity.

## Natural Disaster Management

Every year, ten of thousands of Cambodian people, especially farmers, are affected by flood and drought. The flood in 2012, although it was not as serious as the one in 2011, impacted the agricultural production and food security of some rural communities in the central and northwestern parts of the country. Therefore, from

---

<sup>2</sup> Bangkok Post, 14 March 2013, <http://www.bangkokpost.com/opinion/opinion/340363/cambodia-optimism-on-temple-unsettles-thais>.

a security point of view, natural disasters always get high attention. Speaking at the opening of the First Phnom Penh Strategic Dialogue in January 2012, Cambodian Defence Minister, General Tea Banh, warned that: “disaster is a great security concern as we have experienced natural disasters more frequently together with the impacts from climate change. In this regard, disaster management is a first priority for regional cooperation. A recent severe flood in South East Asia has stimulated us to take effective measures to mitigate its impact and create an effective mechanism for a timely response.”

The role of the military in disaster relief missions has been widely acknowledged and appreciated. During the serious flood in 2011, the military was the first to intervene in search and rescue. Now, the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces (RCAF) is in the process of developing its capacity for rapid response to both domestic and international natural disasters. International cooperation on capacity building is crucial for Cambodia. For instance, recently, with the support from the United States, the RCAF is building its mobile medical and engineering capabilities. RCAF co-hosted along with the United States, the multilateral planning augmentation team Tempest Express (MPAT 19) in March 2012. Other activities that may help the RCAF to enhance HA/DR capabilities include training, exercises, civil-military projects, and various civic-action programs.

It is necessary to review disaster relief capabilities in the region in order to provide support in a timely and effective manner. Under-resourced countries can perhaps extend manpower and some basic capabilities, while more capable partners can assist in training, providing additional equipment for small mobile teams and, most importantly, transportation to the affected areas. This initiative can be enhanced either through regional centers for disaster response, the ASEAN Humanitarian Assistance (AHA) Center in particular, or via bilateral mechanism. In this strategic endeavor, energetic contribution from ASEAN’s dialogue partners is highly encouraged.

## **Pandemic Diseases**

Bird flu reoccurred in Cambodia in 2012 and early 2013. There were eight reported deaths due to H5N1, the highest worldwide mortality rate. In early March, Prime Minister Hun Sen urgently called for immediate response to curb the spread of

H5N1. Due to its limited capacity to address the issue, Cambodia called for strong support from international organizations, particularly the World Health Organization (WHO) and other regional countries. Since 2003, bird flu has killed 30 Cambodians.

## **Maritime Security**

The combination of offshore exploration of oil and gas on the Cambodian coast and the possible exploitation of these mineral resources in the near future, and the increasing sea based international trade of the country as its economy strongly moving towards export orientation, requires the government to put more emphasis on strengthening national maritime defense capacity. Recently, maritime security is regarded as one of the top security issues for Cambodia. Cambodia created the National Committee on Maritime Security (NCMS) in December 2009. The main mission is to enhance maritime sovereignty and strengthen the enforcement of rules at sea. NCMS is also a national mechanism to facilitate relevant institutions and ministries in maintaining good order at sea. To put in place command structures and facilitation activities, the NCMS was created and endorsed by the Prime Minister. There are four operational principles of the NCMS namely: (i) maritime domain awareness, (ii) sustainable protection of national interests at sea, (iii) deterrence of all maritime threat, and (iv) rapid response to incidents at sea.

To facilitate the joint operation of the joint forces, the NCMS has constructed its own front line command structure located in the Ream Maritime Base with support from the United States and Australia. In the near future, key institutions such as the maritime forces, national police forces, and officers from the Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Transport, Fishery Department, Customs, and Ministry of Environment will coordinate and work together on the front line to effectively implement the principles and maritime interests. Recently, Cambodia sent mid-level officers to Changi naval base in Singapore for maritime security information-infusion as part of its contribution to regional maritime security efforts.

With regards to the issue of the South China Sea, it is clear from a Cambodian point of view that the ASEAN-China framework is the most appropriate and effective forum to discuss and manage the disputes and tensions (not to solve sovereignty disputes). The effective implementation of the Declaration on the Conduct of

Parties in the South China Sea (DOC) and the formulation of the Code of Conduct (CoC) can serve as the foundation to build trust and confidence, and manage the tensions and crisis if it happens. The momentum of continuous consultations and dialogue in view of seeking peaceful solutions and implementing the DoC through practical cooperation needs to be maintained. All parties need to strictly adhere to the international law in maintaining peace and stability in the region. The South China Sea should be an area of cooperation and joint development rather than confrontation. Freedom of navigation is the core interest of all nation states, so it needs to be observed and protected.

## **Mekong Water Resources Security**

Cambodia is very much concerned with recent development along the Mekong River especially with regard to the impacts of climate change on the river flow, and manmade hydropower dam construction along the mainstream of the river. The dams will seriously negatively impact food security as well as biodiversity degradation. The tension between countries and communities sharing this trans-boundary water resource will increase. Without sustainable development and management and cooperation, it can lead to serious security implications. It is necessary to strengthen the role of the Mekong River Commission (MRC) in managing the resources in a sustainable way, in view of shared regional interests and common regional public goods. It is important for ASEAN to be more active in promoting discussion and reconciling differences.

## **Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crimes**

Although for the time being Cambodia has not been faced with serious terror threats, it is necessary to always be ready and prepared to respond. The key principle is to “prevent terrorist acts from happening,” rather than being too reliant on response measures. This principle includes a policy of non-discrimination and measures to prevent radicalization. Nevertheless, Cambodia’s counter-terrorism capabilities remain limited. Although Cambodia has some counter-terrorism units, a lack of equipment and expertise remains a major challenge. In this regard, Cambodia is working with the US and Australia in efforts at building Cambodia’s counter-terrorism capabilities.

Like other countries, Cambodia is facing various problems of transnational crimes. Narcotics are the most serious one. Cambodia was once just a transit point, but it has now been affected by the impact of amphetamine. Circulations of this kind of drug have worsened in the past few years. The Royal Government, with cooperation from foreign friends, has stepped up its efforts to cope with this serious problem. Additionally, Cambodia is committed in collaborating with other nations in fighting other transnational criminal acts such as human trafficking, money laundering, cross border terrorism, etc., Close cooperation with neighbors is essential for promoting border security and the safety of cross-border trades. In 2012, there was good progress in promoting bilateral cooperation between Cambodia and Vietnam, Thailand, and Malaysia on addressing transnational crimes.

## **Security Sector Reform and Governance**

Being aware of the gap between security providing institutions (armed forces, police, military police) and security oversight institutions (national assembly and senate, judiciary, civil society organizations), and the low level of trust between the general public and the armed forces, the Ministry of National Defence took initiatives to promote multi-stakeholders' discussions on security sector reform and governance in January 2012. In his opening remarks at the first Phnom Penh Strategic Forum, Defence Minister, General Tea Banh, stated: "For a sustainable development and for strengthening democratization, RCAF has been promoting security governance through security reform. In fact, the transformation and development of a country's security must be done in a broad context in the socio-economic and political reform. The security reform is not able to separate from other priorities and strategies of a nation. This clearly indicates that the security reform is closely linked with the reform of national security development that reflects priorities and abilities to response to the challenges of national security and human security". Moreover, as chair of the ADMM Retreat held in Siem Reap in November 2012, General Tea Banh, also encouraged ASEAN defense leaders to think about sharing best practices on security sector reform and governance in the region in order to strengthen national and regional peace and stability. Security reform can be a part of regional cooperation efforts to promote security. It also reflects ASEAN's direction towards an ASEAN political and security community, in accordance with the ASEAN charter.

To implement SSG-SSR, it first needs to strengthen national and regional measures aimed at rebuilding, restructuring, and reforming the security apparatus and the relevant justice institutions. The activities can include, among others, partial reforms such as defense reform, intelligence reform, police reform, border security reform, judicial and prison reform. Secondly, Cambodia needs to have measures aimed at strengthening civilian management and democratic oversight of the security apparatus and the relevant justice institutions. The activities can include, among others, reforms of the relevant ministries and their management capacities, the parliament and its relevant committees, as well as the relevant judicial oversight bodies.

## **Peacekeeping Operations**

The year 2012 marked the seventh year of the deployment of Cambodia's de-mining company in Sudan. Their humanitarian activities are exemplary and have been recognized and admired by experts as well as by the local people affected by the landmines. In compliance with the UN requests, Cambodia deployed a contingent of engineers and de-miners to Lebanon in November 2011. A unit of Hospital Level 2 and a company of Gendarmerie were deployed to South Sudan. Cambodia contributes a number of RCAF units under the UN's Standby Arrangement System. With support from the United States, Cambodia organized the Global Peace Operation Initiative Exercise (GPOI) under the name Angkor Sentinel in July 2010, which involved more than two thousands personnel from 24 countries. In addition, a smaller scale PKO exercise, Angkor Sentinel 2011, was conducted at the PKO Training Center near Phnom Penh in order to further strengthen the capacity of the RCAF in peacekeeping operations.

In the regional context, Cambodia has actively supported the establishment of ASEAN's peacekeeping center, and is ready to share experiences with its friendly countries in ASEAN. Cambodia would propose friendly countries in ASEAN to help support the establishment of a mine action center in Cambodia as part of efforts for peace and humanity. At the 21st ASEAN Summit in November, the leaders adopted the establishment of an ASEAN Regional Demining Center initiated by the Cambodian chair, in order to promote regional cooperation on de-mining as part of peacekeeping operations.

Cambodia has received capacity building support from different countries in peacekeeping. In 2010, for the first time, Cambodia hosted the Global Peace Operations Initiative with the support from the United States. In 2012, the French government helped to train 300 Cambodian security personnel especially in peacekeeping operation.<sup>3</sup> In 2013, Japan started sending experts to train Cambodian peacekeeping forces at Cambodia's National Center for Peacekeeping Forces and ERW Clearance (NPMEC).

## **Non-Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD)**

The Cambodian constitution of 1993 prohibits the manufacture, use, and storage of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons. In addition, the government issued a draft law in 2009 to ban the production, fabrication, receipt storage, transport, and use of nuclear, chemical, biological, and radiation weapons. To support the global movement on non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, Cambodia ratified the NPT in 1972. Cambodia resumed its membership with IAEA in 2009 after its membership lasted from 1958 to 2003. It ratified the Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material in 2006. At the regional level, Cambodia acceded to the Southeast Asia Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone Treaty in 1997.

Cambodia participated in PSI exercises in 2006, endorsed the PSI statement of interdiction principles, and became the participating state of PSI in 2008. The principles are: Interdict transfers to and from states and non-state actors of proliferation concern to the extent of their capabilities and legal authorities, develop procedures to facilitate exchange of information with other countries, strengthen national legal authorities to facilitate interdiction, and take specific action in support of interdiction efforts. In 2009, the US supported Cambodia in strengthening port control over strategic goods.

---

<sup>3</sup> It needs to be noted that France is the most active EU member states supporting the Cambodian defense sector since early 1993. France was also active in peacemaking and peacekeeping in Cambodia in the early 1990s. Under the framework of UNTAC, France sent a big group of peacekeeping forces and supported disarmament and reintegration process of different factions of the Cambodian armed groups. Since then, hundreds of Cambodian military officers were sent to France for training.

In September 2012, speaking at the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) Summit in Teheran, Prime Minister Hun Sen stated: “the Non Proliferation Treaty (NPT) on Nuclear Weapons should be universalized and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) should be ratified by NAM members without further delay.” In November 2012, the National Assembly of Cambodia ratified two international conventions on Early Notification of a Nuclear Accident or Radiological Emergency and Nuclear Safety to maintain peace, security, safety, and to prevent nuclear proliferation.

## **Cooperative Security**

Cambodia has been active in regional and international security engagement. Confidence building measures in the Asia-Pacific are the core of ASEAN centered regional security cooperation. ASEAN is a key to mitigate and solve regional differences and disputes. Cambodia, as a responsible member of ASEAN, tries to enhance the culture of security cooperation and norms of ASEAN, which are peaceful settlement of the disputes, and non-use of force or threat to use force. It is believed that dialogues and negotiations need to have both trust based and rule based approaches. There is a need to apply smart and dynamic defense diplomacy in accommodating and harmonizing different ideas and interests.

Cooperation has become the core of international relations, and the culture of dialogue gets its strong base in the region. Speaking at the opening session of the second ASEAN Defence Senior Official Meeting Plus (ADSOM Plus) in Siem Reap in April 2012, Cambodian Defence Minister stated that: “We come to understand that your security is my security, and my security is your security. Our security is so much connected and interdependent that we have come to realize that our security community and connectivity is our destiny, and that can be earned. This is no longer a ‘zero-sum game’ environment, and the region as an entity has worked very well to reduce the security dilemma that used to be rampant in our region. In short, our ASEAN region has moved from the competitive security mindset towards the norm of cooperative security.”

## **Regional Security Architecture**

Strengthening the effectiveness of regional security institutions such as the ASEAN Regional Forum, ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting (ADMM) and ADMM Plus, the East Asia Summit can serve as the foundation for regional peace and stability. Maintaining the central role and capacity of ASEAN in driving regional architecture is the core to deter power competition and rivalry in the region. Cambodian Prime Minister, Hun Sen, stated at the 19th ASEAN Summit in November 2011 in Bali, Indonesia that “While the geopolitical landscape of East Asia is evolving rapidly, ASEAN should further strengthen its institutional and internal mechanisms so that ASEAN can continue to be in the driver’s seat in coordinating with dialogue partners, especially the big powers, thus ensuring long lasting stability, peace, and economic development. . . It needs to forge a closer cooperation between the ARF and ADMM Plus (ASEAN Defense Ministers’ Meeting Plus) as the two mechanisms provide the synergy to reinforce regional confidence building.” Moreover, in the opening remarks of the 6th ADMM in Phnom Penh in May 2012, General Tea Banh suggested that ASEAN Defence Ministers consider establishing a Master Plan of ASEAN Security Connectivity in order to better coordinate, synergize, and synchronize different regional security institutions and norms.

Strengthening dispute settlement mechanisms and the capacity of ASEAN is urgently necessary. Speaking at the opening session of the 21st ASEAN Summit in November 2012, Prime Minister Hun Sen stated: “The early ratification of the protocol on the ASEAN Charter on Dispute Settlement Mechanisms by member countries will help uphold the ‘culture of compliance’ within ASEAN. In addition, we need to further strengthen coordination among executing agencies to promote resource mobilization, and incorporate regional agreements into national development programmes and plans of member states. . . Maintaining regional peace and security is indispensable for ASEAN’s prosperity and inclusive growth in the entire ASEAN region. In this regard, ASEAN has to further strengthen its capacity and role in the discussions and cooperation mechanisms with ASEAN Dialogue Partners to address issues related to regional peace and security.”

## **International Cooperation on Capacity Building**

Security cooperation in the Asia Pacific region has been developing quite remarkably at different levels. The ASEAN centered and multilayered security architecture is regarded as the foundation of security cooperation in the wider Asia Pacific region. However, the limited capacity of some member states of ASEAN to adapt, socialize, and integrate themselves into such dynamic and institutionalized security cooperation creates certain constraints and challenges. It is therefore necessary for the regional countries to narrow the security capacity gap within the region in order to encourage more equal and responsible participation of all the member states of ASEAN. It should develop regional programs and projects to strengthen security related institutions and human resource development on security issues. Capacity building process itself can be developed into the creation of a common security norm and identity within the region. For Cambodia, it has received support from different countries. Australia, China, France, Japan, and the US are among those active contributors in supporting RCAF in terms of military equipment, training facilities, and capacity building.

## **Conclusion**

As a small and poor country in the region, Cambodia always pursues neutral and balanced defense and security policy with an emphasis on bilateral and multilateral cooperation and partnerships. The emerging national and regional security issues can be effectively addressed through national security reform and international cooperative security partnerships and institutional building. To gain international recognition and support, Cambodia has been active in peacekeeping operations, especially de-mining activities under the United Nations framework. Cambodia has also been active in the sharing of responsibility and leadership within the ASEAN framework, and in navigating and charting the central role of ASEAN in an expanded regional security architecture. To realize these objectives, however, Cambodia really needs to strengthen its own capacity and resources.

The prospect of Cambodian defense and security policy will be much shaped by the new realities taking place at the national, regional, and global levels. Leadership changes in some countries with new foreign policies and power projections are challenging the regional security outlook in 2013. It is predicted that tensions in the

South and East China Seas are going to increase this year due to different factors, especially the increasing assertiveness of the claimant states and lack of bilateral and multilateral mechanisms to cool down the tensions. Whatever strategic trajectory it may evolve, peace and development are expected to remain the key guiding principles of the international relations in the Asia Pacific region.

For Cambodia, legitimate self-defense is always the core of the national defense policy. To maintain national stability, Cambodia needs to implement more effective security sector governance and reform with the participation from all relevant stakeholders. The principles of human rights, democracy, and good governance need to be observed and strengthened in order to promote mutual trust especially among the government, military, civil society organizations, and general public. As far as regional security and stability are concerned, the norm of cooperative security needs to be maintained and nurtured, while the quality and effectiveness of regional security institutions need to be deepened and expanded.