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# FORESTRY POLICY AND PRACTICES OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF KAMPUCHEA, 1979–1989

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At the end of 1988, Prime Minister Hun Sen, summing up the achievements of the decade of the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK), 1979 to 1989, gave little credit to the development of the Cambodian forestry sector, saying, "After the Fifth Party Congress [in 1985], we started to implement plans for timber exploitation, but in terms of conservation, reafforestation, processing for exports, the management of timber exploitation, and capacity building for the industry, we did very little, almost nothing.<sup>1</sup> This assessment may be contrasted with the breakneck speed at which the industry developed in the 1990s. The prime minister's concerns for conservation and preservation of forests also stands at odds with subsequent industrial practices throughout the 1990s. Controversial issues surrounding the rate and extent of logging, illegal and abusive practices, and the undisguised collusion of leading political and military officials in what amounted to major theft of the country's forestry resources after the Paris Peace Agreement in October 1991 provoked strong reactions among international donor and credit agencies, as well as non-government organizations, which have used government reforms in forestry policy as a test case of the Royal Government of

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*Asian Survey*, 42:5, pp. 772–793. ISSN: 0004–4687

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1. Hun Sen, *Dop Chhnam ney Domnaeur Kampuchea: 1979–1989* [The ten-year journey] (Phnom Penh, December 1988), p. 255. The PRK ruled Cambodia for the decade 1979–89. In April 1989, as part of the internationally brokered peace plan, the PRK constitutionally replaced itself with the State of Cambodia that itself was dissolved following the Paris Peace Agreement of October 1991 and in preparation for the U.N. supervised elections of 1993.

Cambodia's willingness to implement policies of accountability and sustainability, most particularly in the area of national revenue collection.

This battle for power over who has rights of access to and control of Cambodia's forest resources is played out almost daily in the national press. It is not the purpose of this paper to explore the ramifications of this struggle, however. Rather, the aim is to examine PRK forestry policy and practice in order to assess the validity of the prime minister's assessment given above, and to describe the structures in place by the end of the regime in 1989 that allowed for the rapid exploitation of Cambodia's forests after its transformation from being a centrally planned economic system to one of freewheeling capitalism. As internal ministerial documents attest, official policies, and the structures which derived from them, were generally powerless in the face of those larger contextual dynamics that eventually determined how those policies were played out.<sup>2</sup>

### Origins of Forestry Policy

On August 16, 1979, the Central Administration Commission of the People's Revolutionary Council of Kampuchea issued a report outlining the arrangement of ministries and provincial departments within the provisional government.<sup>3</sup> It stated that the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry would be led by Men Chhan with Phauk [*sic*] as vice minister responsible for forestry and fisheries. Kong Sam Ol, agricultural engineer, was to act as special technical adviser to the minister.<sup>4</sup> The Department of Forestry and Hunting (DFH) was established on October 10 that year with a staff of just 16 members.<sup>5</sup> All government ministries and their departments suffered from an acute shortage of trained and experienced personnel, and the DFH was no exception. During 1979 and for at least the first half of 1980, while the government adminis-

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2. The primary sources used in this paper are documents of Cambodia's Council of Ministers, 1979–1989, housed in the State Archives, Phnom Penh, translated by the author; and Philippe Le Billon, "Power Is Consuming the Forest: The Political Ecology of Conflict and Reconstruction in Cambodia," Ph.D. diss., University of Oxford, 1999.

3. "Report Concerning the Planned Arrangements for Restoring Cadres in the Ministries and Provinces," Administration Commission, Central Committee, Communist Party of Kampuchea, August 16, 1979.

4. When the PRK government officially formed in 1981, making provision for a Council of Ministers and a Council of State, Men Chhan was appointed as a vice president of the Council of State. Kong Sam Ol then became minister of agriculture and remained in that position until mid-1985. Say Chhum was minister for agriculture until August 1990. Mat Ly was a vice minister of agriculture from January 1979 until becoming president of the mass organization for trade unions in 1985. For details, see Raoull M. Jennar, *Les Clés du Cambodge: Faits et Chiffres, Repères Historiques, Profils Cambodgiens, Cartes* [Cambodian keys: Facts and figures, historical references, Cambodian profiles, maps] (Paris: Maisonneuve & Larose, 1995).

5. Le Billon, "Power Is Consuming the Forest," p. 152.

tration was establishing itself and cadres were selected and trained, administration in all sectors was weak and at best ad hoc. At the same time, demand for timber products, especially for housing construction and repair, was high. The people were thus granted free access to forest resources in order to meet their immediate personal needs.<sup>6</sup>

The duties and authority of the DFH within the Ministry of Agriculture were formally set out in Decision No. 165/80 of July 17, 1980.<sup>7</sup> Even before then, however, the government had given orders for the protection of the forests. On May 10, 1980, President Heng Samrin issued a directive to all people's revolutionary committees, that is, the local administration throughout the country down to village level, to cooperate with the forestry-hunting section "in order to explain, direct, educate, and forbid the people to cut timber and take timber from forests, to protect and take care of the forests along the rivers and along the roads, and not to sell timber for private gain."<sup>8</sup> The decision's Article 4 stipulated that if someone contravened the order, that person "should be stopped and educated and directed. As for evidence, it should be confiscated for the advantage of the state."

According to Philippe Le Billon, despite the increased presence, if not authority, of forestry officials in the early 1980s, central directives like these were easily circumvented once they reached the base:

By the mid-1980s, every province and district had a forestry office. But the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries (MAFF) never achieved firm control of forestry exploitation, not even at the lower levels of its authority. While politicians usually pointed to the ongoing war as the main reason for the forest's mismanagement, the Department of Forestry and Wildlife (DFW) staff in Phnom Penh denounced the independence of provinces as the major factor leading to anarchy. The staff in provincial offices was often recruited by provincial authorities without consultation with the DFW in Phnom Penh, and without regard to their technical expertise. Provincial reports were not sent to central authorities, sometimes in order to protect the interests of, or avoid confrontation with, provincial authorities.<sup>9</sup>

The issue of incorrect procedure was referred to in a memo that Agriculture Minister Kong Sam Ol sent to the Council of Ministers in 1983, where he

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6. *Ibid.*, p. 153.

7. This decision is noted in the archival documents relating to the DFH. It is also referred to by Le Billon, who notes that apart from providing the department with a legal mandate over forest management, the decision "also provided the People's Revolutionary Committee of the provinces and municipalities a wide range of rights, which remained criticised by department officials until the late 1990s." *Ibid.*, pp. 154–55.

8. "Directive Concerning Measures for Protecting Forests," no. 100-80KB, People's Revolutionary Council of Kampuchea, Chairman Heng Samrin (signed and stamped), Phnom Penh, May 10, 1980.

9. Le Billon, "Power Is Consuming the Forest," p. 154.

complained that uniformity (*aikheap*) in the relations between the various departments within his ministry was not yet complete.<sup>10</sup> He thought that the relationship between the ministry and the provincial departments did not operate well, and that the whole “line” of responsibility was not clear. The Ministry of Agriculture was certainly not the only ministry experiencing these problems. Early documents frequently refer to the “phenomenon” of provincial departments acting without the permission of the Center, of line ministries that refused to cooperate with each other, and of government officials colluding with private businessmen to sell state goods on the free market.<sup>11</sup> Neither official corruption nor the unwillingness of provincial authorities to cooperate with the central government was new to Cambodian politics. For most of the decade of the PRK, however, the opportunity level for corruption and evasion remained low because of barriers to economic development, especially the international embargo on credit and trade that Cambodia shared with Vietnam, the legacy of wartime destruction and neglect of economic infrastructure, and the lack of technical personnel.

Economic development per se was not really possible until 1981, which was also a year of significant political achievements for the young regime. Popular elections for a National Assembly were held at the beginning of May. The Assembly’s first task was to approve the new Constitution, which had taken more than a year to draft and to obtain the approval of the PRK’s Vietnamese mentors. The Fourth Party Congress was convened from May 26 to 29, attended by 162 delegates. Its four key decisions provided the framework for national reconstruction until 1985. Another significant event that year was the staging in December of the Third Congress of the Kampuchean United Front for National Salvation (FUNSK), under whose banner the combined Cambodian dissident forces and the People’s Army of Vietnam (PAVN) had routed the forces of Democratic Kampuchea. Having decided that the original 11-point program of the FUNSK had been realized, the congress agreed to rename it the Kampuchean United Front for the Construction and Defense of the Motherland. National defense and nationbuilding were set as the goals for the party and the front, for the years ahead.

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10. “Memo Concerning the Report on the Progress and Difficulties in the Method of Working,” no. 1732KSK, Ministry of Agriculture, Minister Kong Sam Ol, Phnom Penh, March 28, 1983.

11. For instance, “Confidential Report Concerning the Situation of Implementing the Duties of Defending and Building the Country in the First Half of 1984 and Directions for Duties in the Latter Half of 1984 of the Council of Ministers,” no. 09RBK, for Council of Ministers, Vice Chairman Hun Sen (signed and stamped), Phnom Penh, July 20, 1984. The report called this form of black marketeering “taking the goods which we make and putting them into the hands of businessmen to act like a gun to fight us.”

The third decision of the Fourth Party Congress of 1981 “Developing and Expanding the Economy and Culture Is a Step towards Socialism, to Lives of Harmony and Happiness”<sup>12</sup> decided to “start from agriculture and take agriculture as a core, in order to solve the living standards of the people, provide raw materials for industry, produce a lot of agricultural produce in order to export as a source of initial savings to build industry and expand the economy.” The production of rice as a staple was to become the core task. Rubber, in particular, and other industrial crops, including kapok, tobacco, jute, and sugar cane, were targeted for expansion. Strengthening *krom samaki* (solidarity groups) in fishing to increase the catch and improve processing was also highlighted.<sup>13</sup> The forestry sector was to develop also but specifically “for the exploitation of firewood and various other forestry products.” In view of the massive destruction of communications and transport infrastructure during the aerial bombardment of Cambodia in the first half of the 1970s, the low level of production stipulated for the forestry industry was a realistic target. Even if there had been enough logging trucks, the country’s degraded roads and bridges would never have withstood their loads.<sup>14</sup> Many of the country’s sawmills and other logging equipment had been destroyed, lost, or looted. A critical shortage of qualified technical personnel was a common factor shared by all departments of the government’s administration. The national economy was very small, and opportunities for growth were few.

According to the decisions of the Fourth Party Congress, the national economy consisted of three parts, the state economy, the collective economy, and the private economy, each with important functions of its own. The state economy was to form the basis, building the infrastructure of communications and transport for the distribution and exchange of goods. It was admitted that, “[at] present, this kind of economy is still small and we must strive to build it in order to expand its leadership role in the foundation of the economy. It is necessary, however, to avoid the tendency to expand all over the place, without thinking about the essentials, the characteristics of production, the competency of management and the efficiency of the economy.”

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12. “Decisions of the Nationwide Fourth Congress of the People’s Revolutionary Party of Kampuchea,” Central Propaganda and Education Commission, People’s Revolutionary Party of Kampuchea (unsigned, undated), 1984. All references to the Fourth Congress are taken from this document.

13. *Krom Samaki*, consisted of between 15 and 20 households per *krom* or group, were the core unit for mobilizing the masses at the base to increase production, provide security and defense, and build support for the party/state. Most groups were engaged in agriculture, but others entailed fishing, forestry, small-scale manufacturing, and so on.

14. Le Billon notes that there were 15 logging trucks for Cambodian administrations and solidarity groups in 1981. This figure had risen to 266 by 1988. See “Power Is Consuming the Forest,” p. 157.

While the main feature of the collective economy was the *krom samaki* for increasing the harvest in agriculture, fishery, forestry, and crafts, in theory at least, there was no compulsion for the *krom samaki* to sell their produce to the state. It was up to grassroots-level officials to provide farmers with sufficient incentives to exchange produce for a range of state-supplied goods and commodities, thereby meeting quotas set by the Center. Given the weakness of the administration and the very thin patina of party control at the local level, the state could not have enforced compulsory returns even if it had chosen to do so. The solidarity groups were free to sell to local business people, if that is where the advantage lay. The groups were also encouraged to exchange with other groups. The main aim of the *krom samaki* system was, in economic terms, to increase production, especially of staple food crops, as quickly as possible. The private economy, as defined by the party congress, comprised the “family economy of farmers, the craft economy, small-scale industry, everyday transport, and small exchange.” While the people were free to sell what they produced on their own family plots in whatever way they chose, at the same time the congress decided, “We must encourage the monitoring of [free-market] activities to have benefits for production, living standards and the exchange of goods.” The emphasis in all sectors of the economy was to build an economic base “according to a small and medium shape” which was appropriate “for the bases of our economy which are still weak.” The congress document noted that there was already a plan for the training of technical and economic cadres “in occupations appropriate for the needs of the economic program.”<sup>15</sup>

### Commercial and Technical Cooperation with Vietnam

The training of technical and economic cadres was provided, in very large measure, by Vietnam. During the years of the PRK, 2,650 scholarships in various technical fields had been also provided by the Former Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc countries, but it was the Vietnamese experts assigned to work alongside their Cambodian counterparts in ministries and government agencies in Cambodia, as well as training institutions in Vietnam, who provided the most-needed technical assistance.<sup>16</sup> Likewise, while the Former Soviet Union, Eastern Bloc countries, and Cuba also acted as sources of aid,

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15. “Decisions of the Nationwide Fourth Congress.”

16. Figures provided by Ministry of Education, 1990, and quoted in Thomas Clayton, *Education and the Politics of Language: Hegemony and Pragmatism in Cambodia 1979–1989* (Hong Kong: Comparative Education Research Centre (CERC), University of Hong Kong, 2000), p. 129.

trade, and technical support throughout the decade, Vietnam was the PRK's main trading partner.

A mandate for commercial exchange and technical support between Vietnam and Cambodia had been given by Article 3 of the Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation between the two countries, signed on February 18, 1979. Bilateral agreements on cooperation and non-refundable economic, cultural, and technical assistance were renegotiated and signed annually, starting from mid-1981. Under the treaty, Cambodian provinces were twinned with Vietnamese provinces according to an arrangement termed the "Friendship Alliance." For example, Kandal was twinned with Ben Tre, Kompong Speu with Cuu Long, Kampot with Kien Giang, Prey Veng with Dong Thap, and Ratanakiri with Nghia Binh and Gia Lai-Cong Tum.<sup>17</sup> Phnom Penh was twinned with Ho Chi Minh City. The provinces were allowed a fair degree of autonomy to enter into contracts with each other for the exchange of goods, and also for the hire of equipment and labor. In Ratanakiri, for example, in 1981 the local plan as presented in fragmentary documents stipulated: Help to build a power plant and water reservoir, meeting halls in 300 localities, a hospital with 100 beds, and a retail building; construct a 12-kilometer-long road in the provincial capital; begin redeveloping a 2,500-hectare rubber plantation; begin exploitation of 2,000 to 3,000 cubic meters of timber; and open a cadre training school at the primary level for 50 people.<sup>18</sup>

The document does not specify, but it may be safely assumed that the "exploitation of 2,000 to 3,000 cubic meters of timber" would be used in exchange for other provisions on the list. That same document also listed the material support Vietnam would provide to and exchange with the Center, that is, the central administration based in Phnom Penh, for 20 key industries, including forestry. For forestry, the supplies listed were: grinders, planes, bladesaws, whetstones, mechanical saws, and some equipment for cutting timber, some materials for use in the skills section, equipment for the exploitation of timber, 12 tractors of various types, five "Emasaet 509" vehicles, a number of mechanical saws, welding machines, drilling machines, lathes, and water pumps; and tools and equipment for increasing the capacity of sawmills in Prek Phneu to 7,000 cubic meters per year, including 2,000 cubic meters of "chriek" wood for export as well as extra equipment for other sawmills at Neak Leung, Kompong Cham, and Kompong Thom; equipment

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17. For a list of the twinning arrangement, see Michael Vickery, *Kampuchea: Politics, Economics and Society* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1986).

18. "The Exchange of Goods as Hire and Various Work between Kampuchea and Vietnam," Appendix 2. This loose fragment was found among other 1981 documents from the Council of Ministers' file in the State Archives, Phnom Penh, and lacks a source of identity. It most probably was appended to the commercial agreement entered into by both countries in mid-1981.

and tools to construct a sawmill complete with machinery with a capacity of 500 cubic meters per year in Phnom Penh; provision of a number of other means for the exploitation of timber.

A circular issued by the Council of Ministers on September 16, 1982, which was signed by Deputy Prime Minister Chea Soth, commented, "Starting from halfway through 1981 until now, the commercial economic exchanges between the provinces and towns of Kampuchea and Vietnam have been practiced in the first step, even though progress has not been generally even and the quantity is small."<sup>19</sup> The directive gave permission for "all provinces and towns to open wide commercial economic relations according to awareness [equality and mutual support in the name of comradeship and to the same advantage] as set out in the commercial agreement between the two countries of 1981." Cambodian provinces were allowed to trade a number of items of agricultural produce, including timber, but were "absolutely forbidden" to trade goods such as milled rice, rubber, oxen, buffalo, and "all goods which the Center imports from abroad such as petrol, fertilizer, chemicals, and machinery" without special permission. The provinces were also free to make their own commercial arrangements with their Vietnamese twinned provinces, especially for "mechanics, workers, and cadres to manage the factories which both parties agree to." The provinces were also permitted to come to terms regarding prices, although there were strict regulations to prevent currency speculation. If a province was unable to utilize all the goods it received in exchange, exchange was allowed with other provinces and towns inside Cambodia if all parties concerned were informed. Accounts were settled directly, province to province. The Council of Ministers' role at the Center was to check the planned programs of economic and commercial exchange and give decisions; quarterly reports were also required.

The draft of one report "Concerning Economic and Technical Cooperation between Kampuchea and Vietnam"<sup>20</sup> explained that until the signing of the Commercial Agreement in mid-1981, the costs of experts and training of cadres, staff, and workers had been provided as non-refundable assistance. In early 1982, bilateral high-level party/state delegations discussed ways of expanding that cooperation among the three Indochinese countries. The report advised that Cambodia should continue to receive non-refundable assistance from Vietnam in the form of advisers and "in the section of training cadres in all sectors." Cambodia would be responsible for guaranteeing the food, ac-

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19. "Directive Concerning Economic Exchange between All Provinces in Kampuchea and Vietnam," no. 31SR, for Council of Ministers, Vice Chairman Chea Soth (signed and stamped), Phnom Penh, September 16, 1982.

20. "Report Concerning Economic and Technical Cooperation between Kampuchea and Vietnam," draft (unsigned, undated), State Archives, Phnom Penh. The report stated that the protocols would be signed in mid-1982.

commodation, transport, and various expenses for those experts while they were in Cambodia. On the other hand, as for tools, materials, and other goods, the report said, "If we need them, we should use commercial exchange." The Former Soviet Union, the Eastern Bloc countries, and "countries which are not socialist" were all considered to be export destinations, but trade with Vietnam was considered to be most profitable. The Commercial Agreement had determined that the commercial ruble, roughly equivalent to one U.S. dollar at the time, would act as the currency of exchange, with prices fixed annually based on the average value of goods on the world market in the previous year. The special agreement between provinces would continue, with prices fixed in the same manner. In terms of production and exploitation, the report noted, "We have resources which must have cooperation and support from Vietnam in order to exploit them." Rubber was given as the main example, but "timber in some regions of the northeast, and fish in the Tonle Sap (Lake) and other rivers" were also mentioned as resources for potential development in areas where security could be guaranteed. The report added, "However, this is a new matter for the Vietnam party, which does not want to face the problem that it should share part of the product or accept the priority right to buy the produce which they come to help us to exploit." On June 15, 1983, subsequent to the 1983 Commercial Agreement that had been signed on April 7, the Ministries of Agriculture of Cambodia and Vietnam signed the "Assistance and Cooperation in Agriculture Agreement."<sup>21</sup> Vietnam agreed to assign nine long-term experts, although none to DFH, and a number of short-term experts, not exceeding 46 people, for one to three months. According to Article 5, "[c]oncerning all matters requiring government assurances":

The Vietnam party will provide the Kampuchea party with some agricultural materials including crop seeds (rice, red corn, kapok, lentils of all types, sesame, papaya), pesticide, medicine to protect and treat disease in domestic animals, and some assorted materials for tractors which Vietnam can produce. The Kampuchea party will settle accounts with agricultural produce. Both parties will set out the needs and the actual quantities along with the foreign trade institutions and assisting foreign trade institutions of both countries to implement these exchanges.

The Cambodian ministry requested help with "examining and studying the organizational management of the two forestry protection stations and to finish delivering material for both stations." Altogether, the materials and equipment for use in the forestry sector appended to that agreement—tractors and logging trucks manufactured in Czechoslovakia, the Former Soviet Union, Poland, and Japan, as well as a 10-ton crane, including transport and

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21. "Agreement Concerning Assistance and Cooperation in Agriculture between the Ministry of Agriculture of the PRK and the Ministry of Agriculture of the SRV for 1983."

delivery to Phnom Penh—were valued at a total of 801,120.75 rubles. Cambodia paid in round logs to a total volume of 9,100 cubic meters (at least 3,000 cubic meters of that to be delivered in 1983 with the remainder being settled in full in the first quarter of 1984), 80% of which would be *phdiek* (*Shorea hypochra*), and the rest *tiel* (*Dipterocarpus alatus*) and *lombau* (*Shorea farinosa*).<sup>22</sup> *Phdiek* was valued at 85 rubles per cubic meter, and *tiel* at 100 rubles per cubic meter. The point of delivery and receipt of the timber would be Phnom Penh, where Vietnam would accept responsibility for its export to Vietnam.

## Development of the Forestry Sector, 1983–1985

As the minister for agriculture explained in a note sent to the Council of Ministers on August 1, 1983, announcing a plan to tax all forestry products,

the work of forestry is making fast progress in line with the recovery of the nation. The quantity of round logs has increased a lot compared to 1981. The number of by-products has clearly increased also. . . . In order to manage and protect the especially valuable source of natural resources of our country and to promote orderly and appropriate exploitation, reducing the careless destruction of forests along with increasing state income, apart from the exploitation [tax] we are making application for a tax to protect and care for forests which is necessary and timely.<sup>23</sup>

Accordingly, the Council of Ministers issued a “Decision Concerning State Budgetary Income to Care for and Protect Forests.” Its Article 2 stated: “For the exploitation of taking a harvest and by-products of forestry, the quantity and the places must have the permission of the Ministry of Agriculture, according to the technical request of the Department of Forestry and Hunting.”<sup>24</sup>

The *krom samaki* and other units with permits to exploit, harvest, and take by-products of forestry were to contribute “*khtung hout prak*,” not specifically a tax, but rather, payments for the maintenance of a fund for the protec-

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22. “Minutes of Meeting Concerning the Exchange of Goods, Materials and Equipment between the Delegation of the Ministry of Agriculture of the PRK and the Ministry of Forestry of the SRV,” Chan Sarun and Then Trung Hieu, Phnom Penh, June 22, 1983. The minutes were confirmed in “Contract Concerning Delivery and Receipt of Materials, Equipment and Goods in Cooperation in the Area of Forestry between the Ministry of Agriculture of the PRK and the Ministry of Forestry of the SRV,” signed Chan Sarun and Then Trung Hieu, Phnom Penh, June 23, 1983.

23. Letter “Concerning Stipulating Income for the State Budget in Order to Care for and Protect Forests,” no. 5063KSK, for the minister, Ministry of Agriculture (signed) Mat Ly, Phnom Penh, August 1, 1983.

24. “Decision Concerning State Budgetary Income to Care for and Protect Forests,” Phnom Penh, for Council of Ministers, Chairman, 1983 (undated, unsigned).

tion and care of forests. The Center would contribute half, the provincial budget would provide for a further 30%, and the rest was to come from the local forestry and hunting fund. The fund would be used for the maintenance and protection of forests, preparing a "forestry structure," determining the trees to be cut, tree planting, training, and monthly salaries. The provincial people's revolutionary committee would issue permits for the movement of forestry products and by-products within the province, the Ministry of Agriculture would award permits for transportation between provinces, and the Council of Ministers would permit the export of timber, depending on the ministry's advice.

By 1983, the structure for conducting commercial affairs between the PRK and Vietnam was clear. Such affairs were arranged by state-run import-export companies. In Cambodia's case, this was Kampexim; its Vietnamese counterpart was Vinimex. A letter sent from Cambodian Minister of Agriculture Kong Sam Ol to Prime Minister Chan Si on April 26, 1983, described how transactions concerning timber exports were conducted at that time. The letter refers to the delivery of 1,552.998 cubic meters of round logs to Kampexim in Vietnam. The original 279 logs had originated in Kompong Thom Province and were floated down the Mekong. By the time the logs reached Phnom Penh, there were only 216 remaining because some had been lost in a collision, some had been taken out and dried at the Prek Phneu mill some 15 kilometers north of Phnom Penh, and a couple had been left in the water in front of the mill there. At Phnom Penh, the number of logs was supplemented by logs from a shipment from Kratie Province. These round logs, plus a quantity of bamboo and timber for scaffolding, were received at the port of Ho Giang by another state company, Mekonimex. Inspection and measurement of the timber, which took one full month to complete, was conducted in Ho Giang, supervised by representatives from DFH, Kampexim, Mekonimex, Vinimex, and Ho Giang provincial customs. The letter noted considerable argument among all parties over measuring.

Not all differences resolved amicably. In June 1983, the Cambodian Ministry of Agriculture sent a three-person delegation that included Chan Sarun as deputy chief of the DFH to Prey Veng Province to look into the matter of a raft of timber being transported from Neak Leung, the provincial river port, to Dong Thap Province in Vietnam. Prey Veng and Dong Thap entered into their commercial agreement in 1982, and one of the goods they agreed to exchange was timber. The Council of Ministers, however, had not yet approved the contract and requested an explanation on the timber shipment. It turned out that Dong Thap had intervened with the Cambodian Ministry of Commerce, which had given permission for the export of timber to Vietnam. In that first year of the agreement, Prey Veng had fallen short of its commitment by 390 cubic meters. The People's Revolutionary Committee of Dong

Thap wrote a letter to Prey Veng on December 14, 1982, requesting the rest of the timber. "Prey Veng Province had not yet decided. Nevertheless, Dong Thap immediately started buying and collecting timber at Neak Leung, tied it to a raft and proceeded to export it to Vietnam."<sup>25</sup> The Prey Veng authorities then issued a series of decisions, first to inspect the raft and to check whether or not it had a legal permit, and then to confiscate the 1,424 logs as State property. The Department of Commerce in Prey Veng then intervened, citing the Dong Thap letter and the Ministry of Commerce's agreement. The Prey Veng provincial authorities allowed the export to proceed, but not before measuring the timber again. They discovered that five logs, almost 81 cubic meters, had been illegally added to the raft. Consequently, the province fined the owner of the raft 29,610 *riel* (approximately \$296 at the unofficial rate prevalent then), according to the stipulation of the provincial tax department.<sup>26</sup> After completing all formalities, the raft of timber proceeded on in late June.

That same morning, the provincial security forces were sent to detain the raft so that the provincial committee could measure it again. Prey Veng forestry officials and the delegation from Phnom Penh decided to go down and inspect the raft themselves. They were too late, however, because the raft had already left. The delegation concluded, "Along with the support of the owner of the raft, and under pressure from the joint commission and security (officials), customs and 'control' (checkpoints) allowed the raft to proceed." Nevertheless, the raft was detained again somewhere below Neak Leung and, as the letter concludes, "the Ministry of Agriculture assigned another group of technical cadres to go down to measure on 25 June 1983."

Perhaps inevitably, as the work of the forestry sector increased and as the means for extracting timber became more accessible to more people, the rate of illegal logging also increased. The DFH was hard-pressed to enforce its own policy of "orderly and appropriate exploitation," particularly when the Vietnamese military, who maintained a defense force of as many as 180,000 troops in Cambodia throughout the decade, were involved. In the final quarter of 1983, the Ministry of Agriculture addressed several complaints of this nature to the Council of Ministers. Deputy Minister of Agriculture Mat Ly advised, "It has long been known that some military staff of Vietnamese units have cut and transported timber without legal permits from the Forestry-Hunting units. In particular, many of those military have carried weapons

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25. "Concerning the Matter of the Raft of Timber (360m<sup>3</sup>) Being Transported to Dong Thap Province," no. 3910 KSK, Kong Sam Ol, minister of the Ministry of Agriculture, Phnom Penh, June 25, 1983. Chan Sarun was appointed minister of agriculture in 2001.

26. The unofficial market rate for the *riel* was 50 = US\$1 in 1981 and 155 = US\$1 in 1986. See Michael Vickery, "Notes on the Political Economy of the PRK," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 20:4 (1990), p. 452.

during the transportation of timber along roads or waterways without slowing down or stopping to let the inspections teams of the Forestry-Hunting units have a chance to examine them.”<sup>27</sup> The DFH monitoring team had observed 16 incidents by road, two by waterways, and four by rail during the period from June 20 to August 23, 1983. The deputy minister acknowledged that the forestry inspectors could not halt such crimes.

Sometimes complicity and corruption on the part of Cambodians occurred also. Just five days after the letter above concerning illegal logging practices by some Vietnamese military staff, Kong Sam Ol reported to the Council of Ministers that DFH inspection teams had observed two boats moored in front of Wat Unolaum, in the center of Phnom Penh, loading 90 tons of resin “in preparation for transportation to Vietnam without legal permits from the Council of Ministers or the Ministry of Commerce.”<sup>28</sup> The boats did have permission, however, from State Customs (permit No. 5401-KR/83) and the order of release from the warehouse (No. 01-10) given by the Ministry of Commerce.

At the end of 1984, Deputy Prime Minister Chea Soth, reporting on the year’s achievements, expressed disappointment with the forestry section, which had had “many difficulties because of the lack of technical cadres and processing equipment,” and because of problems in interprovincial relationships and in security.<sup>29</sup> Only 65% of the planned 100,000 cubic meters of round logs were exploited, and total figures were actually 24,555 cubic meters less than the previous year. A total of 12,069 cubic meters of timber had been exported to Vietnam, Germany, Poland, and Japan. Care must be taken with these figures, however, because what may appear to be a drop in production in fact represented the failure of the Center to collect logs from the provinces. Logging did not decline; provincial authorities and other interested parties simply became better at evading the law. One example of this is included in Hun Sen’s lengthy report of October 15, 1985, summing up the country’s achievements in the first nine months of the year. Referring to the forestry sector, Hun Sen wrote:

The distribution of sites for exploitation between the forces of the Center and the forces of the base still isn’t clear. Some bases don’t try very hard in providing

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27. Letter “Concerning the Illegal Cutting and Transporting of Timber by Vietnamese Military Staff of Various Units,” no. 8126KSK, for the minister, Ministry of Agriculture, Mat Ly, Phnom Penh, October 26, 1983.

28. Letter “Concerning Harvesting Companies in the Country Putting Forestry By-Products on Boats to Prepare to Take to Vietnam without Legal Permits from the Council of Ministers,” no. 8238KSK, Kong Sam Ol, Phnom Penh, October 31, 1983.

29. “Report Concerning the Situation of the Implementation of the Duties of Defending and Building the Country in 1984 and Objectives for Duties in 1985,” no. 14RBK, for Council of Ministers, Vice Chairman Chea Soth, Phnom Penh, December 5, 1984.

timber to the Center; they provide it slowly and the quality is not good. The quantity of timber which the base provides to the Center was 15,000 cubic meters, or 47% of the planned amount. Timber prepared for export was 12,454 cubic meters, and we think that by the end of the year, timber exports can achieve according to the set plan. The work of preparing contracts for the handing over and receipt of timber between the Department of Forestry and Hunting and the Accounts and Imports Department is meeting with large difficulties in the matter of principles for implementation. At present, the organization and use of timber and the system of cutting timber is [*sic*] a matter which must be managed more precisely.<sup>30</sup>

## National Defense and National Development, 1985–1989

The eighth session of the National Assembly's first legislature commenced in January 1985 and had elected 32-year-old Minister of Foreign Affairs and Deputy Prime Minister Hun Sen as prime minister of the People's Republic of Kampuchea. Almost immediately after his appointment, sweeping changes to the executive branch were made. Radical changes continued throughout the next three years as revolutionaries and ideologues were swept from office and replaced by younger, technically qualified personnel. Kong Sam Ol, the minister for agriculture until the 1985 reshuffle, was "interpreted as indicating that Hun Sen . . . was 'establishing direct personal control over crucial sectors of the economy'."<sup>31</sup>

The Fifth Congress of the People's Revolutionary Party of Kampuchea was held in Phnom Penh from October 13 to 16, 1985. The 250 delegates to the congress represented the party's 7,500 members.<sup>32</sup> In his political report, Chairman Heng Samrin acknowledged the weaknesses within the economy:

we still have several economic components operating simultaneously and that is an objective reality. The responsibility of our party and state is to build a national economy in conformity with the conditions of the country, reorganize production in the direction of socialism, in which the state-run economy and collective economy are the main components of the national economy. In order to correctly utilize the existing possibilities and the capacities of production and to mitigate the weaknesses of the state-run sector, we advocate the development of our economy

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30. "Report concerning the State of Affairs of Implementing the Defense and Construction of the Country in the Nine Months of 1985 and Objectives and Duties in the Fourth Quarter of 1985," no. 05RBK, for Council of Ministers, October 15, 1985.

31. *Far Eastern Economic Review* (FEER), January 12, 1989. In 1987, Kong Sam Ol was appointed deputy prime minister and the following year was made "Minister Responsible for the Cabinet of the Council of Ministers." Say Chhum replaced him as minister and served until August 1990.

32. *Ibid.*, December 25, 1986. This figure is also quoted by Hun Sen in *The Ten-Year Journey*, p. 416.

encompassing four components: economy of the state-run sector, collective economy, family-run economy, and private economy.<sup>33</sup>

In line with the decisions made at the congress, Hun Sen sent the draft law concerning changes to Article 12 of the Constitution to the National Assembly on February 1, 1986, with the explanation that "in order to utilize the level of possibility and capacity of production which we have at present and to fulfill and increase the state economic base which is still weak, the Council of Ministers asks the National Assembly to define the composition of our economy as follows: state economy, collective economy, family economy, and private economy."<sup>34</sup> As Heng Samrin had pointed out, the existence of the private economy was objective reality and had been operating virtually unchecked, competing with the state economy from the earliest days of the regime. However, if this constitutional change was intended to stimulate the economy through private investment, the state first had to provide the basic infrastructure, including regular water and power supply, as well as guaranteed supplies of raw materials and spare parts. Given the international embargo and the very small manufacturing base inside the country, these guarantees could not be met. Nor was the government in any position to recoup taxes on profits earned. The "exploitation" (*achivekamm*) tax was levied at from 8% to 26% of annual profit for fisheries, construction, forestry, and transport, but tax revenues remained minimal throughout the PRK.<sup>35</sup>

The 1986 surrender to the free-market system was due to many factors. The state economy increasingly failed to meet demands for salaries and services to its cadres, soldiers, and civil servants nor could it supply the farmers with sufficient goods and services in repayment for the quotas it set for agricultural produce. Moreover, following the formation of the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK) in 1982 among the resistance forces along the Thai border, the ongoing war with the routed Khmer Rouge forces grew in intensity. Vietnam, itself in economic crisis due in part to the burden of maintaining PAVN troops inside Cambodia, put pressure on the PRK to accept more responsibility for its own defense. The 1984-85 dry season offensive, the largest and most aggressive since 1979, drove all the resistance bases off Cambodian soil into Thailand. The success of the offensive came in large part to the preparatory work done by the use of thousands

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33. (U.S.) Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS), Phnom Penh Domestic Service, October 15, 1985.

34. "Report to the National Assembly Concerning the Law for Changes to Article 12 of the PRK Constitution," no. 01RBK, for Council of Ministers, Chairman, Hun Sen, Phnom Penh, February 1, 1986.

35. "Memo to Council of State Concerning Request to Change the Tax Policy on Industrial Commerce," no. 27LS, for Council of Ministers, Chairman, Hun Sen, Phnom Penh, April 1, 1985.

of Cambodian civilians according to the K5 Plan (*phaenkar kor prahm*) to seal the border and prevent the incursion of resistance troops.<sup>36</sup> Acts of state coercion such as the K5 corvée were repaid in kind to the people by increasing liberalization of state control of the economy and property ownership.

The K5 Plan necessitated a massive program of forest clearance with the aim of depriving the enemy of sanctuary bases once they infiltrated the cordon of minefields and metal spikes that ran the length of the Cambodian-Thai border from the point where it met the Lao border down to the border with Koh Kong Province. When the plan was finally completed, this cordon was 1,000 kilometers long. In preparation for the 1984–85 offensive alone, 500 square kilometers of forest were cleared. The destination of all this timber was not recorded in the official documents. It is widely believed, however, that Military Chief of Staff Soy Keo, the original leader of the Permanent K5 Commission, was removed from his post—and subsequently from the Party Central Committee at the Fifth Congress in 1985—for grand corruption involving the illegal export of timber.<sup>37</sup>

Apart from increased cooperation in national defense, the PRK also accepted the terms and conditions for increased relations in economic and cultural cooperation with Vietnam (and Laos) in 1985. Further to Circular No. 427 SRMCh of December 18, 1984, “to encourage and to increase cooperation in all sectors between Kampuchea-Vietnam-Laos,” the Council of Ministers issued a directive the following May for its implementation.<sup>38</sup> The aim of this increased cooperation, according to the directive, was “towards expanding strongly all possibility of labor, basic resources, and technical materials of each country to cooperate with the alliance to help resolve the urgent needs in the area of production and livelihood for the time ahead.” The Council of Ministers was to provide leadership and “create good conditions for all ministries/general departments, all provinces/towns to carry out economic and technical cooperation with ‘the party of our friends’ [that is, Vietnam], well and effectively.” The provinces would continue to exchange goods and services under the terms of the 1979 Friendship Alliance after they had sent their plans of cooperation to the Ministry of Planning for checking. The northeastern provinces were granted dispensation “for some years ahead”

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36. For details of K5 see Margaret Slocumb, “The K5 Gamble: National Defense and Nation Building under the People’s Republic of Kampuchea,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 32:2 (June 2001), pp. 195–210.

37. General Soy (Seuy) Keo is now commander of Military Region 1 based in Ratanakiri, where he is still reported to be engaged in the logging business. Le Billon makes reference to illegal contracts Soy Keo made with timber merchants in Stung Treng in the 1990s. See “Power Is Consuming the Forest,” p. 323.

38. “Directive Concerning the Increase in Relations of Economic and Cultural Cooperation between All Sections and the Bases of Kampuchea with All Sections and Bases of Vietnam and Laos,” no. 09 SRNN, for Council of Ministers, Chairman Hun Sen, Phnom Penh, May 18, 1985.

to keep all of what they produced for their own use or for trade with their twinned province, without having to supply the Center with a quota.

That directive also gave the duty to the Ministry of Planning, in cooperation with the Ministry of Economic Cooperation, to develop a five-year economic program (1986–90) and a plan for 1986 that would provide a basis for increased cooperation with Vietnam and Laos. Heng Samrin had made reference to the first five-year program of socioeconomic restoration and development (1986–90) in his speech to the Fifth Party Congress. The first and most important objective, he said, was to stimulate agricultural production. To this end, he named four “spearheads”: rice, rubber, timber, and fisheries. Timber production was supposed to reach an output of 200,000 cubic meters per annum.

The plan for the exploitation of timber in 1986 was set out in a directive containing 11 articles, which the Council of Ministers issued on December 25, 1985.<sup>39</sup> Five “forestry sites” were assigned to the DFH for long-term management of exploitation and conservation. These sites were in the north-east provinces of Ratanakiri, Stung Treng, Mondolkiri, and Kompong Thom, and the eastern province of Kompong Cham. They covered a total forested area of 624,000 hectares, approximately 90% of which was available for exploitation. A further eight forest regions, in Kompong Speu, Kampot, Pursat, Battambang, Siem Reap, Preah Vihear, Kratie, and Koh Kong Provinces, encompassing 516,000 hectares “with possibility of exploitation,” were set aside for cooperation with the Ministry of Forestry of Vietnam and Ho Chi Minh City. The DFH of Cambodia’s Ministry of Agriculture was responsible for long-term management, protection, and reforestation in those eight regions.

During 1986, the DFH was permitted by that directive to commence direct exploitation in Ratanakiri and Stung Treng. In the other three “forestry sites,” the extraction of timber would continue according to the *krom samaki* method, but it was hoped that those areas would also be ready for direct exploitation by the beginning of 1987. In provinces lacking forest resources, the directive urged officials to “plant trees actively in their province/town by mobilizing the people and by cooperating with the Ministry of Agriculture.” The line ministries responsible for implementation of this directive included Agriculture, Planning, Finance, Foreign Economic and Cultural Cooperation, National Defense, and Interior, along with the people’s revolutionary committees of the provinces/towns.

All bases engaged in forestry were ordered to organize militia to protect their security. The K5 Plan had succeeded insofar as there were no more dry-

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39. “Decision Concerning the Plan for the Exploitation of Timber in 1986,” no. 209 SSR, for Council of Ministers, Chairman Hun Sen, Phnom Penh, December 25, 1985.

season offensives on the scale of that of 1984–85. The cordon did also effectively restrict the number of guerrillas entering Cambodian territory from the Thai side. However, many forces, particularly the Khmer Rouge, did infiltrate but once inside found returning to Thailand was difficult. Consequently, they set up more and more bases deep inside Cambodia, particularly around the Tonle Sap Lake from which they launched terrifying raids on the local populace. The remoteness of forestry bases made them excellent targets, so the militia forces, and support from the KPRAF (Kampuchea People's Revolutionary Armed Forces) were necessary. Their support, however, had to be paid for. For example, in May 1987, the Council of Ministers allowed the army and state authorities in the state forest regions an extra 3% to 5% bonus over the stipulated amount of timber that they were permitted to extract.

The target for timber exploitation in 1987 was 150,000 cubic meters of which 35,000 cubic meters would be for export. That figure excluded "cooperative exports between the twinned provinces and the Ministry of Forestry of Vietnam in the northeast."<sup>40</sup> Deputy Prime Minister Chea Soth advised, "Closely bring together exploitation and the protection of forests, and step-by-step we should plant trees. . . . Eliminate the wanton destruction of trees."<sup>41</sup>

Demand for Cambodian timber increased significantly in 1987. As a memo from the cabinet of the Council of Ministers stated, "These days, all friendly socialist countries want to buy our Kampuchean timber."<sup>42</sup> The DFH was advised to expand its capacity for milling timber and to that end, was told it should cooperate with Kampexim to import sawmills from Japan so that Cambodia would be able to export milled timber by the end of 1988 or early 1989. The memo also noted, "Encourage the provision of timber to Vietnam and Center II in the northeast, and avoid transporting it through Phnom Penh, which creates a lot of expense for the state" (due to distance and transportation costs). The forestry sector was further encouraged by a loans policy.<sup>43</sup> State forests could take out short-term loans from the National Bank of Kampuchea to procure materials; they were also permitted to plant other crops in the forests and use the proceeds from their sale to repay the loans and share out among the staff. The bank also offered loans for

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40. "Directive Concerning Building the Socioeconomic Plan for 1987," no. 17 SRNN, for Council of Ministers, Vice Chairman Chea Soth, Phnom Penh, August 16, 1986.

41. "Directive Concerning Building the Socioeconomic Plan for 1987."

42. "Concerning Measures to Ensure the Implementation of the Exchange of Goods in 1988 with Effectiveness, Management and Distribution of Imported Goods for 1988," no. 1103 SJN, for minister for the Cabinet of the Council of Ministers, Vice Minister Sieng Saron, Phnom Penh, September 10, 1987.

43. "Decision Concerning the Policy of Loans for Forestry," no. 119SSR, for Council of Ministers, Chairman Hun Sen (signed and stamped), Phnom Penh, September 14, 1987.

small sawmills and for transportation. The forestry *krom samaki* were able to get both long- and short-term loans.

Incentives such as these worked in terms of increasing gross output. In 1987, the target for round logs, 151,000 cubic meters, was fully met. Although the distribution of timber and fuelwood among provinces that lacked resources was much better than in the previous year, Hun Sen said, "the delivery of timber to the Center was small."<sup>44</sup> He alluded to recurrent problems in the sector:

The weak point of the sector is timber which is cut but a lot is left lying in the forest. The consumption of timber is still not according to the objectives of the state. There are still problems with the quality of the type of timber for export. The volume of timber exploited by cooperation still does not have clear principles of distribution, and timber is left in the forest to lose quality. All bases which have the function of caring for and protecting forests have not yet performed well.<sup>45</sup>

In fact, the problems of caring for forests and the proper management of timber exploitation had become acute by 1987, as the report by the Commission for the Economy and Budget to the National Assembly session in July that year clearly stated. The abuses the speaker referred to had occurred in Kompong Speu:

[T]he illegal cutting of timber and the illegal transportation is [*sic*] still going on. The province has (taken) measures to stop it, but it is as if they have no effect. If this chaos continues, some day our country will meet severe difficulties, because our commission has checked and seen some places where there used to be a lot of forests, but now they have become cleared fields. Before, we used to say that it was the activities of the enemy which caused us to encounter difficulties in cutting and protecting the forests. However, in reality, we see that the people who can cut the trees know only how to continue cutting without stopping.<sup>46</sup>

The writer claimed that precious timber like *korki* (*Hopea odorata*) was being destroyed for firewood. The commission termed this "national destruction," and argued that "our tree-planting is still only in principle and actually we are not implementing it well at all."

As a result of concerns such as those expressed above, the Council of State in June 1988 issued a decree-law concerning the management of the forestry

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44. "Confidential Report Concerning the Situation of Implementing the Socioeconomic Plan for the Nine Months of 1987 and the Measures for Implementing Duties in the Fourth Quarter," no. 07 RBK, for Council of Ministers, Chairman Hun Sen, Phnom Penh, October 27, 1987.

45. *Ibid.*

46. "Report Activities of the Commission for the Economy and Budget to 13th Session of the National Assembly, First Legislature," draft, July 7, 1987.

sector.<sup>47</sup> This lengthy law containing 42 articles made a clear distinction between “categorized forests” and “protected forests” and set rules and regulations for their management. Article 9 stated simply, “Harvesting of forest products and sub-products of any kind without permit shall be absolutely prohibited.” Timber operators were to comply with permits that stipulated the boundaries of their operations, duration of contract, process for tax payments, the allowable minimum diameter of specified species that could be cut, and so on. These stipulations were laid down by the Ministry of Agriculture. The issuing of permits for the transportation of logs remained as before. That is, the provincial DFH had the right to approve the movement of logs within the province, and this permit had to be approved by the provincial people’s revolutionary committee. To move timber across provinces, the central DFH and the Ministry of Agriculture issued permits. The export of forest products was the responsibility of the Council of Ministers.

At the end of that year, in December, the Council of Ministers handed over to the Ministry of Agriculture’s DFH in a decision the right “to gather and export logs and processed timber abroad according to the objectives and principles of the state plan. The Ministry of Agriculture (DFH) has the right to export forestry products and sub-products outside the plan of the state.”<sup>48</sup> The Ministry of Agriculture was given further rights to use the foreign exchange coming from the export of forest products to buy equipment “to serve the management and protection of forest resources and to serve the exploitation as well as processing” and to sign contracts for export and import, respecting the conditions of foreign trade management. As Le Billon notes, in 1988, the forestry sector started to open up the economy to capitalist countries, with direct exports to non-socialist countries revealing to the Cambodian administration the high prices timber could command on the international markets, exceeding \$2,000 per cubic meter.<sup>49</sup>

Forestry policy in Cambodia was thus well-poised for the massive influx of foreign timber companies after 1991. In 1989, Thailand banned commercial logging; in 1991 Laos tightened controls on logging; and in 1992, Vietnam set up a log and sawn wood export ban.<sup>50</sup> All eyes turned toward resource-rich Cambodia, where diplomatic efforts had already commenced to end the

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47. “Decree-Law Concerning the Management of the Forestry Sector,” no. 35 KrJ, for Council of State, President Heng Samrin, Phnom Penh, June 25, 1988. Translation is also provided by Sin Men Srun, “Forest Practice Rules of PRK,” Humboldt State University, Arcata, California, September 1992.

48. “Decision Concerning the Export of Forestry Products and Sub-Products,” no. 274 SSR, for Council of Ministers, Vice Chairman Chea Soth, Phnom Penh, December 2, 1988.

49. Le Billon, “Power Is Consuming the Forest,” p. 159.

50. *Ibid.*, p. 144.

long civil war.<sup>51</sup> As Le Billon pointed out: "After 30 years, Cambodia still had forests but no industry, while Thailand had an industry but no more forests. In other words, war destroyed Cambodia and preserved its forests, while reciprocally, peace constructed Thailand and destroyed its forests. The transition of the late 1980s meant the incorporation of Cambodian forests into this destructive peace."<sup>52</sup>

## Conclusion

When Cambodia won independence from France in late 1953, forests covered 73%, or about 13 million hectares, of Cambodia's total land area.<sup>53</sup> Between independence and the outbreak of civil war in 1970, the annual harvest of logs was, on average, 350,000 cubic meters plus an additional volume of 1.8 million cubic meters of fuelwood. The first decade of the war saw the volume of logs extracted drop to approximately 100,000 cubic meters. The second decade, that of the PRK, saw annual production rebound to about 140,000 cubic meters of round logs and a further 2.4 million cubic meters of fuelwood. In total, during the 20 years from 1973 to 1993, commercial logging, shifting cultivation, and wood harvesting for fuelwood and charcoal production removed about 1.1 million hectares of dryland forests and a further 316,900 hectares of edaphic forest. This was about half the average rate of degradation that occurred in other countries of the subregion during the same period.

After 1991, the rate of deforestation inside Cambodia increased dramatically. Forests provided a valuable source of income for rural people but, more significantly, they were also important revenue sources for the various factions and armies in the leadup to the 1993 U.N.-sponsored general elections. The rate did not slacken after the elections. Official statistics suggest that 1.5 million cubic meters of logs were extracted in 1995 alone, "but actual removals may be close to 2.3 million cubic meters."<sup>54</sup> State revenues from all this commercial logging activity were minimal. World Bank statistics for the value of exported wood products in that year gave a minimum worth of \$185 million, exclusive of logs exported illegally; government revenues that year reported just \$18.7 million deriving from wood exports.<sup>55</sup> In December

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51. In 1987 the PRK announced a policy of national reconciliation, and in December that year, Hun Sen met with Prince Sihanouk in France. In July 1988 and February 1989, the Jakarta Informal Meetings brought all conflicting parties together and a basic agreement on the substance of a settlement of the "Kampuchean question" was reached.

52. Le Billon, "Power Is Consuming the Forest," p. 193.

53. Ministry of Environment, *National Environmental Action Plan 1998–2001* (Phnom Penh: January 1998), p. 3. The figures which follow are also from this source.

54. *Ibid.* p. 4.

55. *Ibid.*

1996, the Royal Government of Cambodia imposed a log export ban, but “despite enforcement attempts, log exports, mostly illegal, are believed to be significant.”<sup>56</sup>

What amounts to the squandering of Cambodia’s natural resources since 1991 stands in sharp contrast to the stewardship mentality that appears to have pervaded the PRK government’s approach to forestry management throughout the 1980s. As evidenced by the internal documents of the regime that have been cited throughout this paper, forestry policy was in line with the scale of needs required for national reconstruction after the catastrophe of the preceding 10 years of bitter civil conflict. Forests were exploited for development purposes, to raise revenue, earn foreign currency, and repay loans according to contracts taken out with countries providing assistance, particularly Vietnam. Theft was investigated and other abuses were roundly condemned, as the report of the Economic Commission to the thirteenth session of the National Assembly in 1987 illustrates.

The Center drafted and passed laws to regulate the forestry industry. Structures were put in place to oversee the implementation of those laws and regulations. That those same laws and regulations were apparently so easily circumvented and contravened had as much to do with the fragile nature of the PRK local-level administration as it did with traditional patterns and notions of power in Cambodia. Provincial governors and department chiefs took advantage of the Center’s weaknesses, as well as of the privileges granted by the system of provinces twinned with Vietnam, to recreate their fiefdoms. Given the client-state nature of the PRK regime, Cambodian forestry department officials were helpless in the face of rebel PAVN units that stole timber. As the dynamics of international politics shifted toward the end of the decade, ideological conviction gave way to personal greed and ambition. Regional forestry policies also played their part, as logging bans in neighbouring countries brought pressure to bear on Cambodia’s own rich forest resources. The PRK period was one of genuine achievement in the face of overwhelming odds. The Cambodian people can only hope that this current and overly long period of “transition” will soon end and that balance will be restored to the country’s forestry policies and practices.

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56. *Ibid.* p. 7.