



**Vietnam did not invade, but revived Cambodia: Hun Sen
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Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen has categorically rejected the notion that Vietnam invaded the neighboring Southeast Asian kingdom in the 1970s, saying Vietnamese soldiers had sacrificed their lives for “the survival of the Cambodian people and the country.”

“I myself cannot explain all the meanings of the word ‘Vietnam’. In brief, Vietnam means the revival and development of Cambodia,” he said at a press briefing on January 3 in Dong Nai Province after a ceremony to launch a monument for Unit 125 the earlier day.

Founded by Hun Sen, Unit 125 was the initial force of Cambodia’s resistance movement prior to the founding of the United Front for Salvation of Cambodian Motherland on December 2, 1978 that eventually defeated the genocidal regime.

The monument was launched to mark what would be the 33rd anniversary of the ouster of the Khmer Rouge regime on January 7.

At the press conference, Hun Sen said he wanted to express his thanks to Vietnamese veterans and war martyrs who “sacrificed for the survival of Cambodian people and the country.”

Commenting on accusations by a former Khmer Rouge leader at a trial last month that Vietnam had invaded Cambodia in the 1970s, Hun Sen said it was not necessary to respond to such “deceitful” words.

“The killer and genocide (perpetrator) defending himself in an effort to evade the crime. Everybody knows our country used to have a genocidal regime and [now] we and the world have opened a trial against them,” he said.

The Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia, commonly known as the “Khmer Rouge Tribunal,” is a national court established under an agreement between the Royal Government of Cambodia and the United Nations to try senior members of the Khmer Rouge.

Khmer Rouge leader Pol Pot died in 1998 without facing justice but the regime's four most senior surviving members, accused of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity, finally went on trial in Cambodia late last year.

Noun Chea, 85, is among four defendants in the tribunal's Case 002 together with Ieng Sary, Khieu Samphan and Ieng Thirith. They face charges of crimes against humanity, grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and genocide, according to the tribunal's website.

Led by Pol Pot, who died in 1998, the Khmer Rouge regime pursued an extreme policy designed to establish an urban utopia that forced people to leave cities, abolished money and outlawed religion. Its brutal practices of wanton executions, overworking of the population and starvation are estimated to have wiped out some two million people from 1975-1979 before the Vietnamese army drove them out of power.

In the book *Hun Sen: Strong man of Cambodia*, authors Harish Mehta and Julie Mehta wrote that Hun Sen was very angry when asked about Vietnam's "invasion of Cambodia."

Reminded of the anger at the press conference, Hun Sen said some people had wrongly described Vietnam's military assistance to Cambodia as an invasion.

"I am ready to strongly reject any such allegations. Vietnam's presence in Cambodia was to meet a demand of Cambodian residents and for their survival... Has any country helped Cambodia as much as Vietnam? No! Only Vietnamese people and army helped Cambodia when it faced the worst difficulties.

"Many of our people were killed by Pol Pot, why can't we ask for Vietnam's assistance? Whenever we became stronger, Vietnam would withdraw its military force. In reality, they withdrew in 1989. They have not been present for more than 20 years," he said.

Edwin Martini, author of *Invisible Enemies: The American War on Vietnam, 1975-2000* and Associate Professor of History at Western Michigan University, said the US had backed the Khmer Rouge and blamed Vietnam for the invasion of Cambodia.

"The long-term US position on blaming Vietnam for the invasion of Cambodia, and the Third Indochina War in general, really was made permanent during the Reagan administration of the 1980s," he told *Vietweek*.

"There was, simply, no sense in Washington that the Vietnamese might also be responsible for stopping the genocide in Cambodia," he said.

In an interview with *Vietweek* in July last year, Martini pointed out that the US was providing "all these supplies and materials to what they called the 'non-communist resistance' when everybody knew full well that most of those supplies and most of those materials were going to the Khmer Rouge."

“There's certainly a recognition among most scholars and historians that Vietnam played a significant role in ending the Cambodian genocide and that the invasion was provoked by the Khmer Rouge,” he said.

Carl Robinson, an Associated Press correspondent in South Vietnam during the 1968-75 period, shared similar views about the US blaming Vietnam.

“I believe the American reaction to Vietnam's invasion and overthrow of the Khmer Rouge regime was one of the most shameful episodes in US foreign policy after 1975,” Robinson told *Vietweek*.

“What's more, they continued to support the Khmer Rouge at the United Nations for many years.

I believe the ‘hard-liners’ won the debate and wanted to punish Hanoi for the way the war had ended only four years before with its attack on the Saigon regime,” he said.

Retired Colonel Andre Sauvageot of the US Army had referred to US’s support for the Khmer Rouge at the time in his statement at a hearing before the Subcommittee on East Asia and Pacific Affairs of the Committee on Foreign Relations in March 2008.

“The United States supported China and the genocidal Khmer Rouge against Vietnam's liberation of Cambodia, e.g., by lobbying the UN to keep ‘Democratic Kamphuchea's’ seat at the UN and lobbying ASEAN to form a united front against Vietnam in Cambodia,” he testified at the time.

Sauvageot had nine years of active duty in the US Army, serving in Vietnam from 1964-73, followed by post-war stints with the US government service to provide political analysis.

He said Vietnam’s role was critical because Vietnam acted unilaterally, with diplomatic support from only the Soviet Union. “The reality is that Vietnam – and only Vietnam – saved the Khmer people from the genocidal, maniacal rule of Pol Pot’s Khmer Rouge,” he told *Vietweek*.

“It was the heroic, but humane People’s Army of Vietnam (PAVN) which after quickly overthrowing the Khmer Rouge effective 7 January 1979, closed the torture chambers/death camps such as Tuol Sleng, stopped the mass killings, known as the ‘killing fields’ and opened a path for a new Cambodian government under the leadership of Heng Samrin and Hun Sen... which eventually would be strong enough to insure that the horror and terror of the Khmer Rouge could never again return to Cambodia.”

He said Vietnam, even though it was still impoverished itself from years of fighting for its independence and freedom, shipped food into Cambodia to help Cambodians whose harvest had been disrupted by the necessary deployment of PAVN to end the horrific rule of the Khmer Rouge.

He alleged that China “was using the Khmer Rouge raids as part of its strategic attempt to force Vietnam to distance itself from the Soviet Union and accept being a satellite in the Chinese Orbit. Beijing also believed Vietnam would not dare do anything to counter their Khmer Rouge allies.

“Sadly, my friends/colleagues in the US government believed the same thing. Khmer Rouge, Chinese, American assessments were all wrong. And frankly I predicted that at the time,” he said.

According to Sauvageot, Vietnam did not want to go into Cambodia and had tried hard to persuade China to quit supporting the Khmer Rouge but to no avail. “Vietnam tried to persuade Khmer Rouge to stop the raids - again could not do so,” he added.

“So only course of action left for Hanoi to protect the freedom and independence of Vietnam was to deploy PAVN’s heroic young soldiers into Cambodia.

“Hanoi not only did not want to go into Cambodia, the Party/Government did not want to remain any longer than necessary to insure that the Khmer Rouge terror (and Chinese supported raids into Vietnam) could never return,” he said.