Cambodia Essay, Research Paper

Since the earliest of Cambodia’s history, this small Asian country has fought for peace and independence from a long string of foreign invaders. It has fought the rule of such countries as Siam, Vietnam, and France over the years. This was also the scene for Cambodia during The Cold War. Japan, Vietnam and the terrorist group known as the Khmer Rouge attempted overpowerment during the conflict of superpowers. This time, Cambodia only managed to have to struggle harder to achieve it’s goals while enduring such hardships as genocide.

During The Cold War, The Soviet Union and The United States were reaching as far as they could to sway countries from the other’s ideals. This rule holds true for Cambodia’s involvement. The Soviet Union was looking to expand communism while the United States was doing anything in its power to stop it. The United States believed that once the Soviet Union had a communist grip on Vietnam, Cambodia’s neighboring country, Laos and Cambodia itself would follow a sort of domino effect and join Vietnam in communism. Following this domino theory, it was easy for the United States to imagine other Southeast Asian countries following suit, such as Thailand and Indonesia, and the possibility of it even stretching to India or Australia. If this happened, communism would have a sure foothold in major countries and would mean chaos to the US. Because of The United States’ fear of this happening, it was willing to do whatever it took, whether it be help or ruin Cambodia and its people for the sake of stopping the Soviet Union. Between 1970 and 1975 alone, the United States provided $1.18 billion in military assistance and $503 million in economic assistance to the Cambodian Government. However, the US also earlier took the steps to bomb Cambodia and kill thousands of citizens at the chance of destroying a few communist camps.

The real beginning of Cambodia’s introduction into play in The Cold War was when the United States, in March of 1969, unofficially and secretly, bombed Cambodia with B-52’s. The continual bombing would last until 1973, essentially dropping 382,851 tons of explosives on Cambodia in an effort to destroy communist supply routes and base camps. This bombing called “Operation Breakfast” was approved by President Nixon and conducted without the knowledge of Congress or the American public. Despite the US’s efforts, the bombings had little effect. In reality, the controversial bombings may have done more evil than good. Hundreds of thousands of innocent Cambodian citizens were now being killed by the bombs the United States was dropping which Cambodia’s head of state, Sihanouk, was suspected of doing nothing against. This drew Cambodians against their government and eventually allowed The Khmer Rouge to gain power.

When the United States abandoned the Vietnam effort in 1975, the Khmer Rouge stormed Phnom Penh, Cambodia’s capital, and cut off the entire country from the world s media. It is estimated the Khmer Rouge systematically killed one to three million Khmer citizens, especially those appearing to be educated. Thus began Cambodia’s arguably darkest period in it’s history. These years of the Khmer Rouge or “The Pol Pot years” began on April 17, 1975 and didn’t end until January 7, 1979. In these years, Cambodia was essentially cut off from the rest of the world. Not since the Nazi concentration camps of World War II had such atrocities been performed upon a population, especially its own population. January 7, 1979 saw the Khmer Rouge overthrown from Phnom Penh and pushed northwest to Battambong Province where they established their capitol in Pailin. The presence of The Khmer Rouge is still felt in Cambodia today.

Cambodia suffered significantly in the closing stages of the Cold War because of the backing it enjoyed from Vietnam and the Soviet Union. The United States isolated Cambodia by cutting all economic and political ties. Using its armed forces and the forces of its allies on the Cambodia-Thai border, The United States went to war against Vietnam and the Soviet Union. The war dragged on through the 1980s, raising hopes among exiled Cambodians that the Vietnamese-sponsored government in Phnom Penh would callapse or be overthrown. The end of the Cold War sharply diminished the interest of foreign powers in the conflict and led to the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Cambodia in 1989.

By signing the Paris Peace Accords in 1991 and various international conventions in 1992, Cambodia s leaders agreed to “support a democratic resolution to the country s long-standing civil war, to protect and advance human and political rights and fundamental freedoms for all Cambodians, and to begin rebuilding the country s shattered economy and civil institutions”. This was essentially the end of Cambodia’s role in The Cold War. They had more or less achieved their goals, The United States was satisfied with Cambodia being non-communist, the Berlin Wall came down and the Soviet Union’s push for power was over.

The United States’ involvement with Cambodia in The Cold War is a turnaround to the current relations between the countries. The US’ policy during the war was basically to take whatever action needed, whether it be aid or bombings, with or against Cambodia. Today, The United States seems to be more interested in setting up trade with Cambodia in hopes it will sustain peace. The United States also continues to support efforts in Cambodia to build democratic institutions, promote human rights, support economic development, and eliminate corruption. In contrast to the US’ history of treatment of Cambodia, a proposed development of foreign policy between these two countries would be to continue peaceful trade and to continue efforts to build Cambodia up both economically and politically. In continuing support and trade with Cambodia, the US sets a feeling of peace and may eventually even gain a strong allie.