



INDEPENDENT STUDY

**CAMBODIA'S DIPLOMACY IN THE BALANCE OF POWERS BETWEEN
CHINA AND THE UNITED STATES**

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ABSTRACT

The objectives of this research were: 1) to find what and how China’s diplomacy has expanded its roles as a major dominant superpower in Cambodia vis-à-vis the United States’ superpower; 2) to analyze what are the effects of China’s expansionism as a major dominant superpower in Cambodia in rival with the United States’ superpower; and 3) to analyze why and how Cambodian diplomacy can use the United States’ rival power to counter-balance China’s dominant power in Cambodia. The research applied a qualitative research methodology by using a documentary research method. The secondary data was collected from various documents, such as research reports, academic books, papers, review articles and newspapers, digital data from internet websites, as well as official documents of governments and international organizations. The researcher analyzes all collected data using content analysis, logical analysis, and comparative analysis to make the research's conclusion, discussion, and recommendations.

This research found that Cambodia regards ASEAN and China as almost equally important pillars of its foreign policy as a small country. Amidst fierce strategic competition in the Indo-Pacific region, Cambodia faces a dilemma of how to maintain ASEAN's centrality without paying a diplomatic price for its key ally, China, and how to balance national and regional interests. Cambodia is currently in the middle of a geopolitical tug-of-war between Beijing and Washington. Against this backdrop, Cambodia seems locked in tensions between Washington and

Beijing, trying to balance ties without jeopardizing its own interests. The US and China are vital to Cambodia's development and certainly to the power of Cambodia's ruling elite. Chinese investment and development aid have contributed significantly to Cambodia's national development, although Beijing's generosity poses some reputational risks. At the same time, Cambodia is not working only with the United States and China, but also with Japan, the European Union, and the ASEAN Community, to promote economic growth, maintain internal stability, strengthen the military, maintain the regional balance of power, and project a contradictory image of their alignment position.

At this point, Cambodia should step back from its current strategic engagement with China and seek ways to diversify its relationships with other major powers while returning to a democratic path and upholding human rights is necessary. The analysis showed that despite the economic benefits, Chinese investment has had a significant negative impact on Cambodia as a recipient of foreign direct investment. There are four aspects of the influence that were discussed: political, sociocultural, environmental, and socioeconomic. The report ends with recommendations on how China and Cambodia may move forward to make sure that Chinese investments in Cambodia have positive rather than negative effects and Charged geopolitics.

Keywords: Cambodia's diplomacy, balance of powers, China, United States

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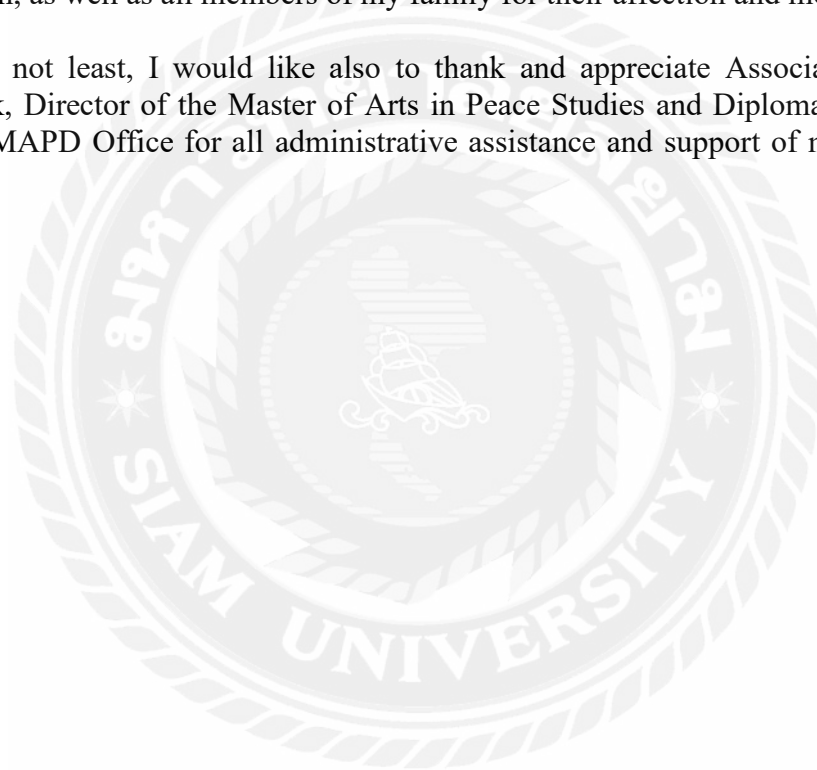
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DEDICATION

**This Independent Study is dedicated to the promoters of peace diplomacy
and justice in Cambodia, my beloved country.**



DECLARATION

I, Phen Sophearoth, hereby declare that this paper is entirely mine and original unless specific acknowledgments prove otherwise. I have done this Independent Study by myself under the close supervision of an advisor.

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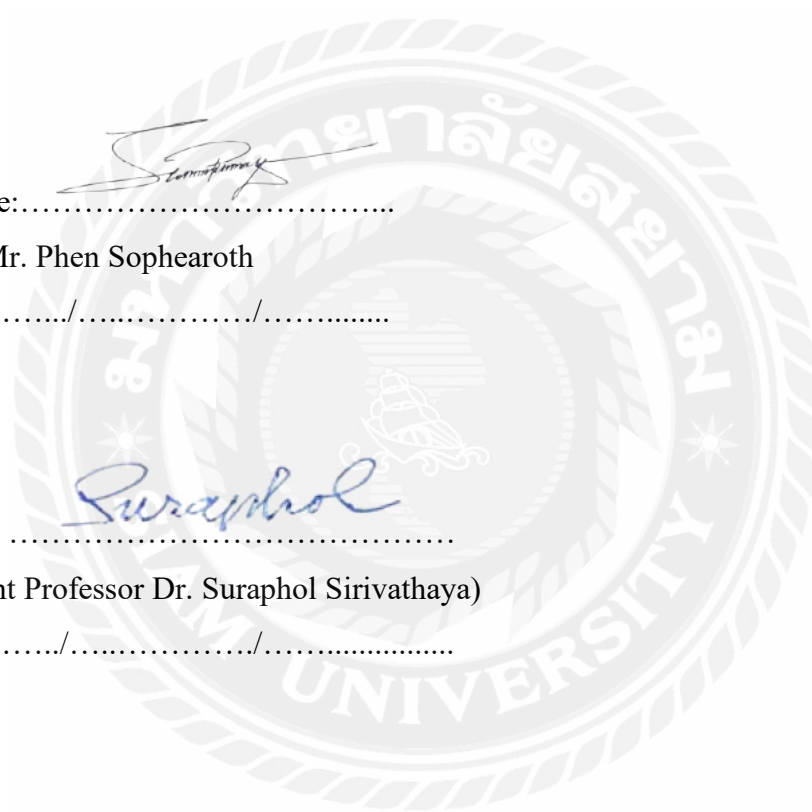


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List of Abbreviations

IMF	International Monetary Fund
ILO	International Labor Organization
WTO	World Trade Organization
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
ADB	Asian Development Bank
AIIB	Investment Bank for Asian Infrastructure
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
EU	European Union
LMC	Lancang-Mekong Cooperation
ODA	Official Development Assistance
ODC	Open Development Cambodia
CDC	Council for the Development of Cambodia
DOC	Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea
PRC	People's Republic of China
SSEZ	Sihanoukville Special Economic Zone
PLA	People's Liberation Army
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
CISMIG	Cambodia Iron & Steel Mining Industry Group
CNOOC	China National Offshore Oil Company
LMI	Lower Mekong Initiative
CPP	Cambodian People's Party
CNRP	Cambodia National Rescue Party
CARTA	Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training
GPOI	Global Peace Operations Initiative
AUMX	ASEAN-U.S. Maritime Exercise
LDC	Least Developed Country
TAC	Treaty of Amity and Cooperation
RCEP	Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership
IAI	Initiative for the Integration of the ASEAN
ACC	Asian Cultural Council
EBA	Everything But Arms
GMSP	Greater Mekong Sub-region Program
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
PAS	Sihanoukville Autonomous Port
LS2	Lower Sesan 2 Dam
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
SCS	South China Sea
MOFAIC	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation
ARF	ASEAN Regional Forum
ADMMP	ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting Plus
SSC	South-South Cooperation
CICP	Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace
TPP	Trans-Pacific Partnership
RCAF	Royal Cambodian Armed Forces
ARC	Royal Cambodian Army

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1 Background and Significance of Research

Cambodia has diplomatic relations with a number of countries, including the People's Republic of China, the United States (U.S.), Japan, France, South Korea, the United Kingdom, North Korea, etc. The state of Cambodia is a member of various international organizations such as the United Nations and its Specialized Agencies, such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), International Labor Organization (ILO), and World Trade Organization (WTO), which are multinational organizations. It's also a member of many regional organizations, such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the ASEAN Community, Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), and the Asian Development Bank (ADB), as well as a founding member of the Investment Bank for Asian Infrastructure (AIIB), financial institution of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (ODC, 2015). Largely as a result of all this attention from China, Cambodia enjoys the fastest-growing economy in Southeast Asia – despite its extraordinarily bad business environment. When it comes to trade, the European Union and the U.S. are much larger export markets for Cambodia. However, China is Cambodia's largest trading partner due to the huge volume of imports the latter takes in from the former. Beijing is also Phnom Penh's principal arms supplier and aid donor (Lohman, 2019)^a. For this reason, China has already begun to expand more economic power to dominate the Cambodian economy.

In the Southeast Asian region, the ASEAN countries, and especially Cambodia, have tried to take advantage of China-U.S. challenges and opportunities for their significant influences and power competition. Therefore, the selection of both of them between these two superpowers and balancing the geopolitical and diplomatic ties with China and the United States is difficult for Cambodia to make its decisions. Cambodia can also take advantage of the rivalry between these two superpowers. In order to ensure that prosperous Cambodia and United States ties are not reconciled, Cambodia will require careful balancing of its relations with China (Veasna, 2015)^a. In light of Cambodia's economy and security growth, the U.S. and China are considered necessary as a current superpower's supports for Cambodian national development. Cambodia's alignments with ASEAN neighboring countries are also complicated. Its interest lies principally in balancing Vietnam. If it moves too close to Vietnam, it risks alienating Thailand and setting public opinion against the government. If it moves too close to Thailand, it faces similar risks to Vietnam. This makes China a more palatable partner for Cambodia than either of the other two (Lohman, 2019)^b. While the expanding Cambodia-China relationship may worry Vietnam, there is little Vietnam can do about it. In contrast, Thailand, which has a more amicable relationship with China, is less concerned about the close ties between China and Cambodia.

The China-U.S. strategic interests in Cambodia are entirely at odds with the national elections in July 2013 and Cambodia's political progress, making it clear that each ruling and

opposition party used China's influence on the United States. In reaction to U.S. representatives from the Fractional Council and financial institutions, it was dubbed the U.S. for strategic reasons during the campaign. Pro-Western politicians accused the administration of a breach of democracy, civil rights, inequality, and corruption. If polls are not fair and competitive, the U.S. and the European Union (EU) have refused to recognize the election result, which may allow Asian countries to steal aid (Veasna, 2015)^b. Many of the Chinese election irregularities investigations favor the immediate outcome. Prime Minister Hun Sen and the People's Party of Cambodia congratulate on the Asian victory in Asia. Foreign Minister Wang Yi travels to Cambodia directly to improve and extend ties and cooperation, adding that Cambodia will benefit from the progress of China. China competes for its assistance in Cambodia with the United States.

The lack of political faith and trust between China and ASEAN countries is the real threat to regional peace and security in Southeast Asia. China needs to convince its neighbors that the rise of China is the rise of the whole Asian region. China's general strategy is that for China to succeed in its global power prediction, it has to do through its soft power in economic and cultural power - not hard power in military power. Currently, soft power has been a critical element in China's foreign policy and diplomacy. Moreover, public diplomacy is practiced to implement China's soft power, which can win others' hearts and minds, lobbies, and touch others to attain the results that China wants through attraction rather than compulsion or payment (Dahles & Pheakdey, 2017). China wants to build a global image of a peaceful rise without compromising its core national benefits. It wants to push its culture and expand its civilization around the world. In the past, China used to be the center of the world, and China's vision is at present time to beautify its historical status and roles in a different form. These strategies are China's effort for the long-term of its so-called "Chinese Dream" for a superpower. In some cases, China's intentions and interests in Cambodia are long-term geopolitical strategies, rather than economic interests. Instead, it is a geopolitical push to understand better why China is attracting Cambodia in unequal relations.

At present, the ASEAN countries are now facing two major strategic challenges: its collective unity and balancing between China and the United States as they compete for influence in the Southeast Asian and Indo-Pacific regions. As an ASEAN member state, one of the major challenges for Cambodia's current and future strategic situation is and will be the competition for influence between the United States and China. This strategic challenge will shape Cambodia's current and future agenda for political reform, economic development, foreign policy, and national defense (Veasna, 2015)^c. Both China and the United States have been competing for interest and influence in Southeast Asia in general and in Cambodia in particular. "As a result, Cambodia faces tough decisions in choosing between the two superpowers and in balancing its relationships with China and the United States so that Cambodia's interests are not compromised. Cambodia is also striving to gain the most possible benefit out of this superpower rivalry". In particular, Cambodia will need to carefully balance its relationship with China to ensure that effective Cambodia-U.S. relations are not compromised. Both China and the United States are considered to be vital to Cambodia's

economic and security development. Cambodia needs a foreign policy of true neutrality to avoid fierce competition in the China-U.S. power rivalry.

While lack of political unity and a concerted effort for prosperity and development following international human rights principles would put the country at a disadvantage, leaving the country to stand by China and the United States, as in their regional influence competition (Ang, 2020). In brief, there is not much apparent benefit derived by aligning with China or the United States only. Taking sides with either of these two superpowers presents risks for Cambodia. Maintaining the “ASEAN Way” and ASEAN centrality would best serve Cambodia’s national interests. Therefore, what Cambodia must do is balance China and the U.S. power simultaneously. Both China and the United States have a role to play. It is up to Cambodia to balance the needs of both superpowers and try to act in a way that satisfies both. Cambodia must sort out its domestic priorities such as eliminating corruption and cronyism, reducing land evictions, preserving human rights, holding open elections, giving land concessions, and so on (Veasna, 2015)^d. At the same time, it needs new infrastructure and resource development which, if properly shared and managed, can also contribute to economic opportunity, poverty reduction, and human rights. The researcher is interested to study therefore to what extent Cambodia’s diplomacy can play its role in the balance of power between China and the United States.

This research intends to analyze the roles of China’s diplomacy as a major dominant superpower in Cambodia vis-à-vis the United States; the effects of China's expansionism as a major dominant superpower in Cambodia in rival with the superpower of the United States; and Cambodian diplomacy responded to the United States’ rival power to counter-balance China's dominant power in Cambodia in order to answer the research questions leading to conclude the research results and recommendations.

1.2 Research Questions

The independent study is designed to respond to the following research questions:

1.2.1 What and how China’s diplomacy has expanded its roles as a major dominant superpower in Cambodia vis-à-vis the United States’ superpower?

1.2.2 What are the effects of China’s expansionism as a major dominant superpower in Cambodia in rival with the United States’ superpower?

1.2.3 Why and how can Cambodian diplomacy use the United States to counter-balance China’s dominant power as a rival power in Cambodia?

1.3 Research Objectives

1.3.1 To find what and how China’s diplomacy has expanded its roles as a major dominant superpower in Cambodia vis-à-vis the United States’ superpower.

1.3.2 To analyze what are the effects of China's expansionism as a major dominant superpower in Cambodia in rival with the United States' superpower.

1.3.3 To analyze why and how Cambodian diplomacy can use the United States' rival power to counter-balance China's dominant power in Cambodia.

1.4 Independent Study Statement

Due to the superpower rivalry between the United States and China throughout ASEAN Community in South East Asia, Cambodia's diplomacy has played the strategy of the balance of powers between the two superpowers. China's diplomacy has expanded its roles as a major dominant superpower in Cambodia vis-à-vis the United States. Cambodia will need to carefully balance its relations with China. The effects of China's expansionism should not compromise the effective Cambodia and the United States relationship. Both China-U.S. influences are considered to be vital to Cambodia's security and economic development. Cambodia's taking sides with either of these two superpowers present risks for Cambodia. Maintaining the ASEAN Way diplomacy would best serve Cambodia's national interests and foreign policy. Therefore, what Cambodia must do is balance China and the U.S. powers. Both China and the United States have a role to play for their own national interests. It is up to Cambodia to balance the needs of both superpowers and try to act in a way that satisfies both. The balance of U.S. and Chinese interests in Cambodia can be supplementary and not confrontational. However, the two superpowers should understand Cambodia's position and find common ground. As a result, Cambodia's diplomacy has to play the strategy of the balance of powers between China and the United States.

1.5 Scope of Research

This research shall be scoped to study Cambodia's diplomacy in responding to play the balance of power between China and the United States during the period of Cambodia's membership in the ASEAN Community after the end of the Cambodian civil war until the present time.

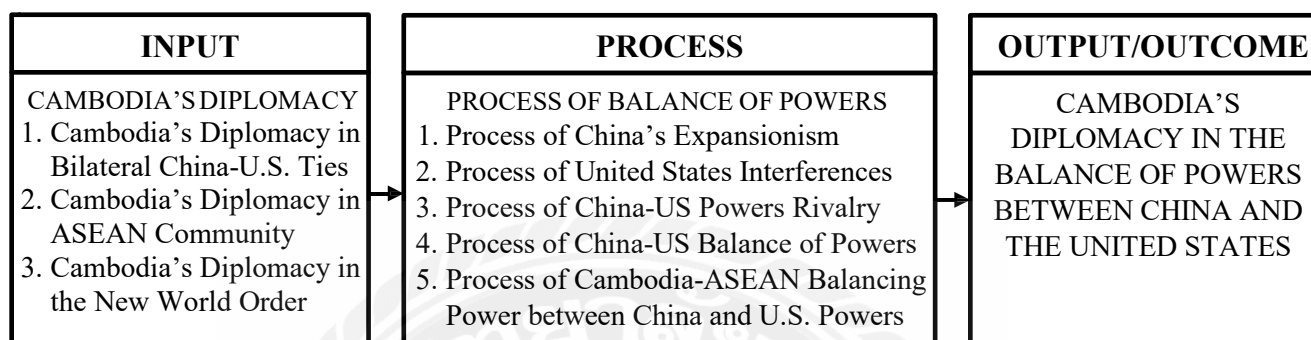
1.6 Research Methodology

This independent study applied qualitative research by using documentary research methods and in-depth interviews with the experts as the key informants to collect all primary and secondary data from documents and expert key informants respectively. After the process of data triangulation, the researcher analyzed all collected data by using content analysis, logical analysis, and comparative analysis, in order to make the research's conclusion, discussion, and recommendations. Secondary data were collected through the documentary research process. Preliminary data were collected through in-depth interviews with the key informants of the pro and con Cambodian government, as well as independent scholars who command expertise on the topic by triangulation process.

1.7 Conceptual Framework

The researcher shall analyze the conduct of Cambodia’s diplomacy in response to China’s expansionism and United States interferences, the rivalry of China-US powers, and the balance of powers that has effects on the internal politics and external affairs of Cambodia, as shown in the following Diagram 1.1

Diagram 1.1: Conceptual Framework of Research



1.8 Definition of Terms Used in Research

Public policy means a course of action created and enacted, especially through a government, in response to the public, real-world problems so-called “the policy cycle”, a government policy, “affects in a country or state” or “the policies in general.”

A dominant superpower means is a state with a dominant position characterized by its extensive ability to “exert influence or project power” on a global scale. The combined means of a superpower as military, economic, technological, political, and cultural strength as well as “diplomatic and soft power” influence.

Expansionism means the doctrine of expanding the territory or the political and economic influences of a country to any other country. It can become a policy of territorial, political, or economic expansion of a powerful country by exercising its influence to dominate any other country.

Balance of power and public policy: In the term of international relations, parity or stability between competing forces, “equal power” or “the cultivation of power and utilization of power” for resolving the problem of power. This means at least two or more actors of roughly equal strength, “preserve their autonomy and states seeking to survive”, “alliance flexibility and ability” to resort to being war if needed, and “protect the nation.” And public policy is the “policy cycle.”

Public diplomacy means a complex of activities carried out or supported by state and non-state actors, which focuses on influencing public opinion abroad with the aim of reaching or promoting a certain foreign policy goal of any country.

Cambodia's diplomacy means the diplomacy of an ASEAN member country based on maintaining friendships with other nations, near and far, superpowers or small nations. As a country, Cambodia adopted a foreign policy for making friends, playing several cards, and building up global networks, which are all about mutual interest and together contribute to global peace, security, and prosperity.

Rules-based international order means a shared commitment by all countries to conduct their activities in accordance with agreed rules that evolve over time, such as international law, regional peace and security arrangements, trade agreements, immigration protocols, and cultural arrangements.

Foreign interference means attempts by one country or a group of actors to manipulate directly or indirectly any domestic or national politics of the other country through covert and deceptive means to undermine its sovereignty, political regime, and economic benefits and harm its social cohesion.

1.9 Expected Benefits of Research

1.9.1 To know how China's diplomacy has expanded its roles as a major dominant superpower in Cambodia vis-à-vis the United States' superpower;

1.9.2 To obtain analysis results of the effects of China's expansionism as a major dominant superpower in Cambodia in rival with the United States' superpower;

1.9.3 To recommend some practical measures for Cambodian diplomacy that can use the United States' rival power to counter-balance China's dominant power in Cambodia.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

In the study of this independent study on “Cambodia’s Diplomacy in the Balance of Powers between CHINA and the United States”, the researcher has collected all related literature and research for literature review before continuing to undertake the data collection and the data analysis, as well as research findings, conclusion, and recommendations. This chapter reviews the existing literature to study concepts and theories of public diplomacy, the balance of powers, power politics, and rules-based international order. The researcher will undertake a literature review on the conceptual theories related to Cambodia’s diplomacy in the balance of powers between China and the United States as follows:

2.1 Concepts and Theories

2.1.1 Conceptual Theory of Public Diplomacy

Public diplomacy, public relations, psychological warfare, or – to be blunt – propaganda, (Brown, 2002). States have progressed from global open diplomacy to the use of public diplomacy to promote and secure their national interests abroad. The public face of traditional diplomacy is public diplomacy (Leonard, 2002). Soft power, according to Joseph (Nye, Jr., 2004), is an international image that emphasizes the values that underpin a government's interests. The Edward Murrow Center at The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy (2009) provides a well-cited definition of public diplomacy that contrasts it with "traditional diplomacy": "It is concerned with the impact of public attitudes on the formulation and implementation of foreign policies". It includes aspects of international relations that go beyond traditional diplomacies, such as governments cultivating public opinion in other countries, the interaction of private groups and interests in one state with those in another, the reporting of foreign affairs and its impact on policy, and statements made by persons whose job it is to communicate, such as diplomats and foreign correspondents. The concept of public diplomacy is based on communication between nations, peoples, and cultures (Rasmussen, 2009).

2.1.2 Conceptual Theory of Balance of Powers

The “balance of power theory” in international relations proposes that states can ensure their survival by preventing any state from gaining enough military power to dominate all others. Robert Jervis shows in his analysis of the conditions for cooperation under the security dilemma that when there is a pervasive offensive advantage and indistinguishability between offense and defense (the “worst case” scenario), the security dilemma between states can be so acute that it can virtually squeeze out the “fluidity” required for any balance of power to occur (Jervis, Vol. 30, No. 2 .1978). (According to the 2018 edition of the Encyclopedia), It simultaneously provides an answer to the problem of “war and peace” in international history.

It is also regarded as a universal rule of political behavior, a fundamental tenet of every state's foreign policy throughout history. As a result, it is a description of a significant pattern of international political action. The authors develop an axiomatic model of the classical balance of power system which is created on the fundamental idea that a stable balance of power requires the absence of a dominant actor or coalition (Chatterjee, Vol. 9, No. 1, 1972). A "power stability" system is one in which the power of the system's states is checked and balanced by the power of others (Schweller, 2016). "Balance of power often mentions to a description of the relative military balance between states; in international relations theory, the most commonly accepted definitions refer to an equilibrium of power between states that maintain stability and peace," writes (Pollard, Volume 2, Issue 2, March 1923).

2.1.3 Conceptual Theory of Power Politics

Power is, without a doubt, the most universal and fundamental concept in political analysis. A definition of power as context-shaping and how this helps us to untangle Lukes' conflation of power, responsibility, and culpability (Hay, 1997. Volume 17 (1). pp. 45-52). Power is highly centralized, despite the fact that political scientists have frequently concluded that power is widely distributed in "their" communities. Presumably, this explains why the latter group refers to itself as "pluralist," while the latter refers to itself as "elitist." A person can fulfill a desire or reach their objectives (Bachrach & Baratz, 1962. 56(4),pp. 947-952.). In the great Western philosophical tradition of thinking about political phenomena, POWER is a critical concept. However, there is a core complexity of its meaning that has to do with individuals' or groups' ability "to get things done" effectively. Formalized formally is defined by (Parsons, 1963. Vol. 107, No. 3. pp. 232-262)."Power here is defined in terms of the relationship between people and expressed in simple symbols. From this definition develops a comparability of power or the relative degree of power that two or more people possess statement". Based on these concepts, members of the U.S. Senate are ranked according to their power over foreign policy legislation as well as tax and fiscal policy (Dahl, 2007.2(3): pp. 201-25).

2.1.4 Conceptual Theory of Rule-Based International Order

The liberal international order (also recognized as the rules-based international order) was established in 1945. The international order established by the victorious partners after WWII has proven to be remarkably durable. The outline of liberal political and economic rules embodied in a network of international organizations and regulations and shaped and enforced by the world's most powerful nations, both fixed the problems that caused the war and proved resilient enough to lead the world into an entirely new era (HOUSE, 2015). Theories of international relations provide a framework for analyzing situations involving interactions between various international actors, as well as the phenomena that result from these actors' decisions and actions. There are three major theories of international relations, each with its own set of assumptions. They are as follows: realism, liberalism, and constructivism (Alfarsi, 2020). Scholars commonly define the international order as the "explicit ideologies, rules, and establishments that define the core relationship among the order's states". (Glaser, 2019). Individual and social group demands, as well as their relative power in society, are emphasized

in liberal theories of international relations as fundamental forces driving state policy and, ultimately, a world order. The “bottom-up” emphasis of liberal perspectives on state-society relations, interdependence, and preference formation has significant implications for understanding international law (Moravcsik, 2012).

2.2 Related Literature

Cambodia is situated in Indochina, the region rocked by war after the French colonization came to an end. After gaining independence from France in 1953, Cambodia was in a position to align itself with neither capitalist nor communist regimes. Two major rivals, the US and China wanted to dominate Cambodia and place this country under the sphere of their political influence. With a view to attaining peace and enhancing national interests, Cambodia had to adopt an overarching policy to balance herself between the West and the East. Cambodia’s position on this continuum has significantly impacted Cambodia's development today. The country is also facing great geopolitical challenges resulting from the U.S.-China competition for influence in the Asia-Pacific region. Evidentially, (Heng, 2020) as one of the downstream Mekong countries, Cambodia is subject to the consequences of water politics and South China Sea disputes involving fellow Mekong countries, and regional powers such as China and the United States. However, Prime Minister Hun Sen and his political party Cambodian People’s Party prioritize staying in power over any other foreign policy objective (Minh, 2019). This chapter provides an in-depth understanding of the basic concepts in this study. It also provides the linkages about the balance of powers between the United States and China in Cambodia to maintain sustainable development and national security. According to a principle of power politics, the rule is based on International Order. What and how extent diplomacy is deemed important for Cambodia. The conceptual framework in the latter part of this chapter centers on the variables of the superpower's competition that affect the balance of powers between both superpowers in this review.

2.2.1 Cambodia’s Diplomacy

Cambodia's foreign policy generally lies on the principle of neutrality and non-alignment. Such a neutral policy was successfully implemented during Sihanouk’s short-lived regime in the 1960s. Unfortunately, the policy faced a fiasco because of Prince Sihanouk’s irrational decision to align with the North Vietnamese leading to the demise of his regime and the intervening years of war until the late 1990s, (Leifer, 1967), and (Pheakdey, 2017). Although the policy failed, its theory and successes are still widely recognized and considered to be conducive to the changes that took place in the regional and international political and economic systems after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Therefore, Cambodia has adopted this policy again, as can be reflected in the new Cambodian constitution promulgated in 1993. The formation of this policy is based on three domains of policy work: strategic, operational, and responsive.

In this regard, a number of studies into Cambodia's foreign policy were conducted. In his study, Smith (1965) analyses the complexities of the relations

with global powers Cambodia had to deal with. He asserts that Prince Sihanouk adopted a neutral foreign policy to cope with security dilemmas that were caused by the confrontation of the superpowers. At that time, the neutrality of foreign policy was the fundamental footprint for security and war prevention. (Gordon, 1965).

Similarly, Leifer (1967) provides an analytical study of Cambodia's foreign policy when Prince Sihanouk's government struggled with national security. This study demonstrates how foreign policy leadership prevented the country from wars, and the policy of neutrality was rational during that time, even though the strategies of Prince Sihanouk were not based on the holding principles of the policy. This was due to the fact that while Sihanouk proclaimed neutrality of Cambodia, he at the same time had contact with the communists in Vietnam. This had drawn Cambodia into the battlefield of the Vietnam War. With reference to this issue, (Pilch, 1988) further argues and explains that the main justification of Cambodian diplomatic policy at that time was the preservation of integrity and independence of the Cambodian nation, in the face of the hostility of its neighbors, much larger in size, and the confrontation between world powers in the region.

However, the present Cambodia political leader by Prime-minister Hun Sen is not much different trend from the Sihanouk king's ways but the previous mechanism it's become a model of Cambodia's diplomat policies to avoid conflict and maintain balance and neutrality is a great choice for continuable leading. So, Phnom Penh must be careful of its public diplomat policy use, for maintaining national interest is a foreign policy framework and a long-term benefit. As a small developing state with limited capacity and resources, Cambodia lacks the ability to exercise its agency and remain truly independent of external forces, particularly influence from China, its closest ally, largest creditor, number one trading partner, and leading provider of foreign aid and according to H.E. Ambassador Sothirak.

The US has played a significant role in meeting Cambodia's needs in the process of nation-building. Deeper trust and good relations between the two would significantly contribute to vibrant and active Cambodian neutrality and can secure the country's sovereignty and independence. This, in turn, would serve US interests throughout the region. US development assistance and engagement should also aim to assist Cambodia to develop a strong sense of balance in its external relations (H.E. Amb. Sothirak, 2020).

As the world changes, new problems are popping up in different parts of the world. For example, China is becoming more important and the United States is focusing more on Asia. Cambodia needs to have a plan for how it deals with these problems and how it interacts with other countries. This plan is called a "grand strategy". It helps Cambodia figure out how to navigate the complicated and sometimes dangerous world to protect its own interests. The Cambodian government has three big ideas for how they want to work with other countries: being part of the big changes happening in Asia, making sure they have peace after a time of fighting, and following some important rules.

- **The first**, is called the "Asian Century." It means that many countries in Asia, like China and India, are becoming very powerful and have strong economies. They are also trading a lot with other countries in Asia. This is making the world pay a lot of attention to Asia.
- **The second**, Cambodia was in a tough situation after a big conflict, but they worked hard to make things better. They had some good chances to work with other countries and become more important in the world. Now, they want to keep making friends with other countries so they can get help to build better roads and help people who are poor.
- **Third**, Cambodia is following a set of six foreign policy principles, described in Article 53 of its Constitution.

Cambodia has some rules to follow. First, it will not take sides in battles or fights. Second, it wants to be friends with everyone. Third, it will not go to other countries to fight or cause trouble. Fourth, it cannot be friends with other countries that want to fight. Fifth, it will not let other countries use its land for fighting, and it won't use its own land to fight in other countries unless it's for helping the United Nations. Sixth, it can get help and training to protect itself

If Cambodia doesn't follow certain rules, it could wind up like it did in the past with lots of fighting and problems. Cambodia is trying to be a good neighbor by not getting involved in other countries' problems, and this has helped them get along better with Thailand. To keep being successful in their foreign policy, they need to work together with experts, regular people, and groups that help others. It would also be good if Cambodia could help solve a big problem in the region, like the one about the South China Sea.

For more evidence, another study (Zasloff & Brown, 1998) in search of peace during the Vietnamese military occupation in Cambodia shows that most of the goals which had been achieved were greatly influenced by larger superpowers and international institutions. Despite the little emphasis on Cambodian foreign policy, the study highlights a milestone in Cambodia's relations with other larger countries, particularly the US and other regional superpowers which led to the establishment of the Paris Peace Agreement in 1991.

In 2010, Cambodia was in a tough situation in Southeast Asia. There was a disagreement between Cambodia and Thailand about a border area called Preah Vihear, and they even started shooting at each other. Eventually, a court made a decision to solve the problem, but the two countries still didn't get along well. In 2012, when Cambodia was in charge of a group called ASEAN, there was a big argument about some islands in the South China Sea. Cambodia was accused of taking China's side instead of listening to other countries in the group. This made Cambodia look bad, and some people thought that China was controlling what decisions ASEAN made through Cambodia. In the second half of the 2010s, Cambodia's relationship with the United States also got worse because of things happening inside Cambodia and because of tensions between China and the United States in the area.

But in a special research about Cambodia's relationships with other countries, the author talks about how Cambodia's government is trying to work together with other nearby countries. The author thinks that if Cambodia does this, it will help Cambodia's foreign policy and how the country grows economically. They also think that by doing this, Cambodia can make more trade deals and have better relationships with other powerful countries, which will help protect Cambodia from being taken over by other countries.

The current tensions Sarit (2014) stated the South China Sea is a serious challenge to ASEAN, and an opportunity for Cambodian diplomacy, given the country's close relations with China. In 2012, during the 21st ASEAN Summit, Cambodia successfully hosted the ASEAN Global Dialogue, which sought to mobilize assistance and resources to implement the Phnom Penh Agenda on ASEAN Community Building (Sarit, 2014)^b. ASEAN, a group of countries in Southeast Asia, wants to do something important to help keep peace in the region. They did something like this before in 2002 when they signed a document with China about how to behave in the South China Sea. Now, they have a new idea. They want to start having regular meetings with China to talk about this document and how to make sure everyone follows it. These meetings would also help build trust between the countries. And maybe, in the future, they could agree on some rules to follow in the South China Sea.

There is a place called the South China Sea where some countries are having a problem. It is causing trouble for a group of countries called ASEAN. Cambodia, which is friends with China, recently held a meeting to help ASEAN countries work together better. Cambodia might try to think of another good idea to help bring peace to that area. One idea is to have a meeting every year where people from ASEAN and China can talk about how to solve the problem and become friends. They could also make some rules to follow in that place. This means that Cambodia is working hard to make friends with other countries and organizations in order to have a strong economy and grow. They want to help their government officials, business owners, journalists, and students become better at their jobs. It's important for different groups to work together and follow the rules to make Cambodia's economy better. Some experts have also talked about how Cambodia's diplomatic policies are important. On the other hand, Pich and Murg, 2020, remarked on the important diplomatic policies of Cambodia.

Since the turn of the century, 'economic pragmatism' - the alignment of foreign policy with economic development interests - has shaped Cambodia's foreign engagement. The Cambodian government sees globalization and regional integration as central to advancing its national economic interests. Cambodia has proactively participated in regional and sub-regional mechanisms, such as ASEAN-led multilateral and Mekong-related minilaterals. In terms of economics, the kingdom's developmental trajectory - as set out in its National Strategic Development Plan - is fundamentally grounded in its membership in ASEAN, and Phnom Penh has worked assiduously to integrate its own economy with those of the broader community. Concomitantly, Cambodia serves as an irreplaceable link in the ASEAN East-West Corridor (Pich & Murg, 2020).

The last decade has been significant for Cambodia on both the global and regional stages. Cambodia served as chair of ASEAN in 2012 and the first Southeast Asian co-chair of the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation (LMC) mechanism from 2016-2018. Cambodia has received a steady stream of official state visits, has paid several official visits in exchange, and has signed Memoranda of Understanding with various development partners collectively strengthening its diverse set of bilateral relationships (Sarit, 2014). However, The Kingdom raised its engagement with China to new heights by signing the Action Plan 2019-2023 on Building China-Cambodia Community of Shared Future in April 2019 - an upgraded position from the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in 2010 - strengthening cooperation and covering 31 measures across five areas of politics, security, economy, people, and multilateral cooperation. In 2018, Cambodia also commemorated the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations with China and the 65th anniversary with Japan. This year Cambodia and the US are commemorating the 70th anniversary of formal relations.

In Cambodia, there are some problems with how they deal with other countries nearby. They had a disagreement about a place called Preah Vihear, but that has been resolved. However, there are still other issues that need to be sorted out. These include things like figuring out where the borders are with Vietnam, dealing with people who aren't registered to live there, arguments about who owns land near the border, deciding where the boundaries are in the ocean, and dealing with politicians who say things to get people angry at other countries. These problems have been worked on a little bit over the past ten years, like setting up groups to help and the Cambodian diplomats in Thailand working with the Thai diplomats on immigration problems. One big challenge is figuring out how to be friends with both China and Vietnam. It's tricky because of a problem in the South China Sea, which Cambodia doesn't have a claim to and hasn't taken a side on. They also worry about what might happen to the Mekong River and how it will affect their relationships with other countries in the area.

So, through deeper and more effective engagement with these inter-governmental frameworks, Cambodia is more likely to garner power and exercise greater agency to realize its national interests and promote regional cohesion. Cambodia's neutral foreign policy, therefore, has been formulated to cope with both national and international trends. In such an interconnected world and interdependent economy, one could not help but conform to the presiding international order. Cambodia though seems to have received very limited 'diplomatic space' to flex around and usually implies negative connotations for its strategic moves in the international arena vis-à-vis its foreign policy. Cambodia has placed the highest importance on the development of sustainable peace and stability in the country as well as the political and economic integration into the regional, and international communities by strengthening and expanding Strategic public diplomacy sectors.

2.2.2 China's Diplomatic Interests in Cambodia

As part of China's broader Southeast Asia strategy, Cambodia receives close attention from Beijing given its pivotal position in the region. According to Cambodia is Chin's leverage

point on ASEAN in 2021, between 1994 and 2014, China accounted for roughly 44% of Cambodia's total foreign direct investment. In approximately the previous ten years, China has committed over \$2 billion in foreign investment to Cambodia (Burgos & Ear, 2010)^a. In 2012, China provided US\$600 million in aid and loans as an example of its financial help during this time period. Since 1997, the relationship between Phnom Penh and Beijing has increasingly been tightened and deepened. Evidentially, in 2010 Cambodia and China signed the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership of Cooperation, which extended the cooperation to wider aspects ranging from trade to security. China is also a preponderant foreign player in Cambodia due to remarkable investment, trade, and aid disbursement. (Xinhua, 2013), From 1992 to 2013, China's aid to Cambodia amounted to up to \$2.7 billion in loans and grants according to Cambodia's Ministry of Finance. The following section will elucidate China's interests in Cambodia, specifically in the notions of strategic, political, and economic.

However, mutual relations between Cambodia and China have been resumed after the 1991 Paris Peace Accord, and China's Official Development Assistance (ODA) dramatically increased after 1998 and become the largest donor in Cambodia in 1999, and the largest foreign investor in 2011. China's ODA was reaching USD 5.8 billion, USD 6.1 billion, and 6.4 billion in 2016, 2017, and 2018 respectively (Kitano, 2019) [7], while China's ODA in Cambodia was USD 311.11 million, USD 327.18 million, and USD 644.8 million in 2016, 2017, and 2018 respectively (CPDSB, 2019).

Today, Chinese interests in Cambodia are extensive and include large hydroelectricity projects, mining, forestry, oil exploration, highways and bridges, biofuel, and manufacturing. According to the Xinhua news agency, Chinese firms are the main investors in a new Special Economic Zone in the southern port of Sihanoukville. In 2005 and 2007, China donated naval vessels to Cambodia to help protect its interests in the South China Sea. In late 2008, China announced it would help fund a new US\$500 million rail link from Phnom Penh to neighboring Vietnam (Xinhua., 2009). Evidently, People visiting Cambodia can see a really big new building being built for the Chinese embassy. There are also a lot of schools teaching the Chinese language. The Cambodian Government decided to add Chinese language classes to universities.

2.2.3 Diplomatic Relationship between Cambodia and China

(1) Political Relations

In the early 1990s, China and Cambodia had a relationship where they were both careful and cautious of each other. China didn't fully trust the political parties in Cambodia, the CPP and FUNCINPEC. They thought the CPP was more organized, but they were unsure about their second prime minister, Hun Sen because he had previously worked for a government supported by Vietnam. FUNCINPEC, led by Prince Norodom Ranariddh, didn't impress China either. They didn't have strong leadership, had internal conflicts, and had a preference for Western countries. China was also upset when Ranariddh allowed Taiwan to open an office in Cambodia in 1994 and when a deputy mayor from FUNCINPEC called Taiwan a year later.

In 1996, the leaders of Beijing were very angry when Ranariddh told everyone that a Taiwanese airline called EVA Air would start flying directly between Phnom Penh and Taipei. The leaders of China were upset because they thought this agreement was too similar to Cambodia officially recognizing Taiwan as its own country. Then, in 1997, the leaders of Cambodia asked the United Nations for help in creating a court to punish the leaders of the Khmer Rouge, a group that had caused a lot of harm in Cambodia between 1975 and 1979. This made the leaders of Beijing worried because they were afraid they would be blamed for helping the Khmer Rouge during that time. China was unsure about which side to support, so they decided to stay neutral and not get too involved. However, they started to become more cautious of Ranariddh and started to get closer to Taiwan instead. They became closer to Hun Sen instead, who would become very influential in Cambodia. China even sent a special plane to pick up Hun Sen and bring him to Beijing for an important visit. They made agreements about trading and protecting investments, and even made agreements between their political parties.

Since 1997, the relationship between Phnom Penh and Beijing has increasingly been tightened and deepened. China's global rise needs no introduction but the country's increased influence in Cambodia, one of the world's poorest countries, has provoked some heated discussion. Although the presence of China in Cambodia is nothing new, the extent of its current involvement in Cambodia's politics and economic development is staggering. Cambodia is one of China's eldest and closest allies. Sino-Cambodian cultural and commercial relations are historic and can be traced back to eight centuries ago when a Chinese diplomat visited (Angkor City in 1296) Cambodia (Heng P., 2012. 31(2),pp.57-85). After that, Sihanouk became friends with important leaders from China like Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai, Deng Xiaoping, and Jiang Zemin. This friendship grew stronger when Sihanouk supported and made Chinese leaders happy by helping them in Southeast Asia. This was important because it helped balance out the disagreements between the Soviet Union and the United States in that region.

Political relations between China and Cambodia reached a milestone in 2000 when they signed the Joint Declaration on Bilateral Cooperation Framework, which laid the foundation between the governments, political parties, and armed forces of the two countries. Hun Sen has touted the development as having "long-term strategic importance" (Storey, 2011). From 2005 to 2008, Cambodia continued to give special political deference to China for its close relations. For example, he supported the law against the secession of the People's Republic of China and opposed the candidatures of Taiwan and Japan to be respected members of the UN and the Security Council. (Thayer, 2013)^b. In 2006, the bilateral relationship was transformed into the Comprehensive Cooperative Partnership, which aimed to improve government-to-government and party-to-party relations and promote collaborative legislative and policy exchanges that support shared international interests. In December 2008, the first Confucius Institute was established in Phnom Penh, signaling the growing presence of Chinese public diplomacy.

Moreover, the relationship between Cambodia and China dates back to at least the 13th century, and the diplomatic relations between the two countries were officially established on July 19, 1958. China's geopolitical interest in Cambodia has changed significantly after the

Cold War (Dr. Pea, 2020). However, it does retain considerable influence, including through close links with the former King Norodom Sihanouk, senior members of the Cambodian Government, and the ethnic Chinese community in Cambodia. There are regular high-level exchanges between the two countries. China has provided substantial bilateral aid, and the economic links have continued to grow. However, Cambodia and China enjoy powerful political relations and military cooperation. In 2006, the two countries agreed to raise their bilateral ties to a comprehensive cooperative partnership and upgraded to a comprehensive strategic partnership in 2010.

From 1999 to 2008, Cambodia chose to be friends with China for three main reasons. First, China promised to stay out of Cambodia's politics, which means they wouldn't try to control what was happening in the country. This made Cambodia feel like they were on the same team as China because both countries didn't like the way the United States was trying to make other countries have democracy. Second, Cambodia was having problems with the United States because of disagreements in their government. The United States was angry at Cambodia for some things their politicians were doing, and this made Cambodia feel like they needed support from China. Third, Cambodia had a fight with another country called Thailand over a temple, and this made them realize that they were in a vulnerable position and needed help. They didn't have a strong military or much support from other countries, so they looked to China for help.

Nonetheless, the kingdom kept a certain distance from Beijing by concurrently engaging Washington, seeking Cambodian cooperation in its War on Terror. In this way, the CPP government could extract military assistance from Washington to improve its armed forces, maintain access to the U.S. consumer market, and sideline the pro-U.S. domestic opposition led by Sam Rainsy. Last, given Cambodia's recent admission into ASEAN in 1999 and its growing interests in multilateral diplomacy, subservience to China would alienate other ASEAN members.

The evidence of Cambodia's limited bandwagoning with China improved their political relations after the CPP marginalized FUNCINPEC in the July 1997 power struggle. Because Cambodia became a strict enforcer of the "One China" policy and began siding with the PRC on international issues, the two countries upgraded their political ties to a comprehensive partnership in 2006, as government-to-government cooperation expanded steadily despite two general elections in 2003 and 2008.

(2) Security and Military Ties

Throughout the 2010s, Cambodia continued to implement indirect balancing toward China to continue modernizing and strengthening the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces. This policy served four purposes. First, it improved the defensive and offensive capabilities of the RCAF in response to traditional threats posed by neighboring Thailand, Vietnam, and Laos. Second, it was an indirect response to regional arms acquisitions made by fellow ASEAN states and the growing geopolitical uncertainty created by the collision between the United States'

“pivot” to Asia and the FOIP and the rise of China’s military power. Third, indirect balancing supplemented modest defense assistance provided by Washington. Last, it improved the RGC’s ability to maintain domestic order, stability, and security.

As of 2019, China was the most significant donor and supplier of military assistance to Cambodia. In December 2009, when Washington suspended the delivery of 200 military trucks to punish Phnom Penh for deporting 20 Uighur asylum seekers, Beijing stepped in with 257 trucks, 50,000 military uniforms, 1,000 handguns, and 50,000 bullets for its national police (Kung, 2014). One year later, the PRC offered a loan of \$195 million for the purchases of 12 Harbin Z-9 helicopters and training for two dozen pilots and mechanics (Thayer, 2013)^c. Between 2012 and 2013, the Cambodian and Chinese defense ministries inked military deals totaling \$17 million. The agreements allowed China to train RCAF uniformed members, construct a Combined Arms Officer School and medical facilities, and provide additional training and equipment.

In 2015, the PRC made a significant donation of heavy weapons, including jeeps, rocket launchers, anti-aircraft guns, and spare parts. For example, the Royal Cambodian Navy conducted its first exercise with its Chinese counterpart in 2016 and negotiated the purchase of two warships equipped with sophisticated missile systems. Cambodia's intention to modernize its modest naval fleet is linked to the tension in the South China Sea and the growing maritime capabilities of neighboring states, which have strengthened their fleets in recent years. As the United States continued to impose strict conditions on military ties, Cambodia turned to China, among other countries, as another supplier and partner (Pheap, 2015). Meanwhile, Cambodia and China are friends and work together on politics and military stuff. They decided to become even closer friends in 2006 and 2010. They also made a plan in 2019 to do more things together like helping each other in politics, keeping each other safe, doing business, making friends with each other's people, and working together with other countries. But sometimes, China's plans for helping Cambodia can be more important than what Cambodia wants. China has a big project called the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and they use it to help Cambodia develop.

Cambodia has fully and actively engaged in China’s BRI because the economic development opportunities generated from this initiative are believed to be tremendous. Tangibly, by the end of 2017, more than 2,000 km of roads, seven large bridges, and a new container terminal at Phnom Penh Autonomous Port were constructed with support from China. A new international airport in Siem Reap, Dara Sakor International Airport in Koh Kong province, and an international airport in Kandal province amount to nearly 3 billion USD in approved airport projects. According to (Kin, 2020)^a, Under the BRI, Cambodia, and China have a great interest in bringing their cooperation to a higher level of partnership. These “partnerships,” however, do not concern governments alone. More interestingly, the 2 billion USD Phnom Penh-Sihanoukville Express way Project has been constructed by the state-owned China Communications Construction Company. In the energy sector, more than 7.5 billion USD in hydropower plants and about 4 billion USD in coal power plants have been invested as well as some 30 agricultural and agro-industrial projects (of which 21 are in operation) (Kha, 2019).

In total, we see evidence of Cambodia's indirect balance towards China, in which it has forged closer ties with the Chinese PLA through joint bilateral exercises, high-level visits between those responsible for defense, and coordination on shared security interests. The PRC was the leading supplier and donor of military equipment to the ARC, whose capabilities and inventory lagged relatively behind its neighbors in the region. As a small state with limited economic resources, Cambodia has benefited enormously from its non-alliance relationship with China. They reinforced the RCAF, complemented the logistical and operational assistance received from the United States, and allowed the country to diversify its defense partnership and avoid overt alignment with a single power. The 2013 and 2018 elections did not force Cambodia's indirect balance towards China to fluctuate. In addition, China and Cambodia signed a plan called the "2019-2023 Action Plan on Building a China-Cambodia Shared Future Community" in April 2019. This plan includes 31 things that the two countries promised to do together in areas like politics, security, economy, people-to-people relations, and working together with other countries. However, the plan might not be getting as much attention as another program called the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which China introduced in 2013. China has been really important in Cambodia because of this program, which they use to help with development.

(3) Economic and Investment Ties

China is building the Sihanoukville Special Economic Zone (SSEZ) which has attracted more than 100 companies from China and other countries with a total investment of more than USD 3 billion in 2017 and created nearly 20,000 jobs for the local community. The SSEZ plans to have 300 factories by 2020. In addition, Chinese investments in the textile and garment industries contribute significantly to the socio-economic development of Cambodia by creating employment opportunities for nearly a million Cambodian workers.

China has also invested in the construction of the Sihanoukville Special Economic Zone (SSEZ) which has attracted more than 100 enterprises from China and other countries with a total investment of more than \$3 billion in 2017 and established nearly 20 000 jobs for the local community. The SSEZ plans to have 300 factories by 2020 (US-China Today, 2020). In addition, Chinese investments in the textile and garment industries contribute significantly to the socio-economic development of Cambodia by creating employment opportunities for nearly a million Cambodian workers. Above all, Chin's BRI means for Cambodia, according to low-skilled workers and women. Chinese investment in the garment industry has opened doors for nearly one million Cambodian workers.

According to statistics published by the Council for the Development of Cambodia (CDC), of the cumulative foreign direct investment (FDI) approved from 1994 to 2019, the largest share came from China (21.81%), which in the first years was the source of significant investments in infrastructure, energy, resource development, including rubber, and tourism. In 2019, investment approvals registered \$9.40 billion, of which China invested \$2.75 billion.

China also pledged to boost bilateral trade to \$10 billion by 2023 and encouraged more Chinese investment in Cambodia. However, Chinese FDI reaches \$860 million in the first 11 months of 2020; bilateral trade between Cambodia and China was \$9.42 billion in 2019, up 27.29% from \$7.4 billion in 2018, according to the embassy (Vireak T. , 2021).

By the end of 2011, Chinese investment in Cambodia amounted to \$8.9 billion and spread across 317 projects (Thayer, 2012). Since 1994, China had poured in \$12.6 billion in investment, and it became the largest FDI source with accumulated funds of \$5.3 billion or about \$1 billion annually from 2013 to 2017 (Nachemson, 2019). The annual inflow of Chinese FDI reached \$3.59 billion at the end of 2018 and concentrated on real estate development, textiles, infrastructure, mining, and agriculture. In the energy sector alone, China 97 was the biggest investor with a capital of \$11.5 billion invested in seven large-scale hydropower and coal-fired power plants, which severely affect the environment, protected lands and animals, and local Khmer communities (Chheang, Vannarith;, 2017). Meanwhile, the two-way trade grew substantially. While Cambodian exports to China increased from \$16.33 million in 2009 to almost 1 billion in 2018, Chinese imports spiked by nearly eightfold from \$881 million to \$6.7 billion in 2018.

In 2017, Cambodia received about \$4.2 billion in official development assistance (ODA) from China in the form of grants and concessional loans. This ODA targeted physical infrastructure, agriculture, health, and education. China is also the primary source of Cambodia's public external debt. At the end of 2017, Cambodia's public external debt stood at \$9.6 billion, of which about 42% is owed to China. China has also pledged \$600 million in grants to Cambodia from 2019 to 2021. At the end of 2017, Cambodia's public external debt stood at \$9.6 billion, of which about 42% is owed to China. China has also pledged a \$600 million grant to Cambodia from 2019 to 2021. Currently, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi has sold \$270 million in aid and three million doses of the COVID-19 vaccine in Cambodia, one of Beijing's closest allies in Southeast Asia (Thul, 2021).

In terms of tourism, 15 airlines operate regularly between Cambodia and China. In nine months of 2019, Cambodia received 1,864,956 Chinese tourists and is expected to exceed 2 million by 2020. However, due to COVID-19, the number of Chinese tourists in the first two months of 2020 has dropped significantly. Cambodia is one of the poorest countries in the world and faces enormous health and education problems. Infrastructure is inadequate and the government is struggling to diversify the fledgling economy away from reliance on tourism, cheap clothing manufacturing, and foreign aid. According to (Kin, 2020)^b and Parameswaran, 2015 similarly discussed, tourism is an important sector for Cambodia, especially when it comes to China. The industry contributes around \$3 billion to the economy and, according to Hun Sen, around 80% of this amount is cultural tourism, with visitors flocking to renowned heritage sites like Angkor Wat. As reported by the Phnom Penh Post, Cambodian authorities are devising strategies to carve out a more significant share of China's outbound tourism market - aiming to attract more than 700,000 Chinese visitors this year and up to 2 million a year by 2020. According to national tourism statistics, China had the second-highest number of tourist

arrivals in Cambodia in 2014, with 560,000 coming second only to Vietnam (Parameswaran, 2015).

(4) Chinese Economic and Strategic Control in Cambodia

China's determination to move closer to Cambodia is primarily pushed by 'hard-nosed' economic self-interest and the pursuit of wider strategic goals in Southeast Asia (Bradley, 2009). In spite of Beijing's language of non-interference and respect for sovereignty, China's aid is by no means free of conditionality, but the strings are attached in different ways. Putting on the strategic views, China's interests in Cambodia could be deciphered in the areas of security, domestic development, and counterbalancing endeavor. Moreover, Given Cambodia's deteriorating political relationships with Western countries, the CPP has become increasingly reliant on engagement with China to support the nation's economic growth and preserve the party's legitimacy.

Cambodia's location is strategic for China in maintaining regional security and stability which are necessary for its domestic development. The alteration in world politics and regional geopolitics in the post-Cold War era had shifted Beijing's world paradigm which under Mao's leadership focused heavily on hard power. By providing aid for development and strengthening cooperation, China gains leverage to increase its influence in maintaining economic and political stability in Cambodia so as to prevent any possible fallout which could disrupt its interests in the region as well as domestic development.

From a geopolitical end, Cambodia's unique location at the heart of mainland Southeast Asia with a coastal line stretching out to the Gulf of Thailand provides China with desirable strategic access, known as the "string of pearls". The historical records revealed China's attempts to bring Cambodia in line. To exemplify, China had approached Prince Sihanouk very closely during 1960, and from 1975 to 1979 China was the backing power of the Khmer Rouge regime. Given that China is heatedly feuding overseas borders with several countries especially the Philippines and Vietnam, Cambodia's geographical proximity stretching to the South China Sea through the eastern Gulf of Thailand would enhance China's reinforcement response shall hostile confrontation arises (Burgos & Ear, 2010)^b. Between 2005 and 2007, China donated to Cambodia nine patrol boats and five warships which are now docked [at Ream Naval base] in Sihanoukville, southwest of Phnom Penh. In addition, as part of the string of pearls strategy, China also helped develop port facilities at Sihanoukville Port. In recent years, China has been increasingly providing military assistance to Cambodia, and those include military vehicles, weaponry, military helicopters, and even airplanes.

Despite the rhetoric of good-natured gestures arguing that the donation will help Cambodia strengthen its security and naval capacity against piracy, drug smuggling, and territorial integrity protection, the real agenda, according to many commentators, is the attempt to build a military bulwark against future threats that could impinge China's core interests in the region. Should a sensitive confrontation happen in the South China Sea, Beijing could possibly utilize the improved facilities in Cambodia to launch responses, earning China

valuable time and effectiveness in operation. Besides, China is not yet a naval power in the blue water given the limited number of aircraft carriers in its fleet, thus China might need to improve Cambodia's port as a surveillance and gas-filling base during future military operations in the region.

One of equal significance, there could be other three different security interests – energy security, food security, and non-traditional security issues – China sees in relations with Cambodia. The outward-looking foreign policy strategy of China is motivated largely by the demand for energy to keep up with the increasing domestic consumption of the growing economy. China became the largest global energy consumer in 2010 and is now the world's second-largest oil consumer behind the US. According to the EIA forecast (Administration, 2013), China will surpass the US as the largest net oil importer in 2014. To illustrate, China imported 5.4 million bbl. of crude oil on average, half of the total domestic consumption in 2012. Annually, China consumes a large amount of crude oil, LNG, and coal, especially from the Middle East and Africa, passing through the South China Sea.

Apart from energy security, China also needs Cambodia in strengthening food security. Since the Chinese middle class has seen a rapid increase and approximately 300 million more people are to be transformed into the urban residents under the massive government urbanization plan, China will encounter food shortages in the years to come as farmers and farmlands decline. In 2011, China for the first time surpassed the US as the largest agricultural products importer (Bloomberg, 2012), and import dependence increased from 6.2% to 12.9% with China's net trade deficit in agriculture and food, standing at \$31 billion in 2012 (OECD., 2013). The concern for food security and the rapid decrease of domestic farmland have motivated the Chinese government and investors to develop massive farmland in Laos, the Philippines, and Cambodia. With 31.5% of arable agricultural land (World Bank, 2018), Cambodia is a potential source of Chinese investment in producing agricultural products for export to China. Evidently, China is now a large stakeholder in Cambodia's agricultural sector.

Meanwhile, economic development in the Western landlocked provinces is another main strategic interest China has in the entire mainland Southeast Asia. China's aid in Cambodia is mostly utilized in support of infrastructure projects, especially hydroelectricity dams. To date, half of the largest hydroelectricity dams are located in China, and China has the goal to produce 15% of its overall energy output from renewable sources to reduce the pollution burden generated by coal-generation power plants. In China's part of the Mekong River, several hydroelectricity dams have been under full operation, and any further construction would increasingly place an ecological burden and vulnerability on lower-stream countries like Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam.

A study indicates that 20% of Mekong water originated in China during raining season, while the figure jumps to 70% in the dry season; therefore, a country like Cambodia is highly vulnerable to hydro dam projects upstream. In this connection, it is of paramount importance to keep countries in the lower basin of the Mekong River like Cambodia silent amidst China's activities (Economy, 2005). It should also be noted that several major dam construction

projects, which involve Chinese companies both private and public-owned, are being carried out in Cambodia. Through these, China manages to influence the former's decision in the Mekong River Commission and refrain from raising its voice against China vis-à-vis sensitive issues.

More than that, Cambodia is strategic to China's maneuver to counterbalance its influence in the region. One of China's interests in ASEAN is to wield influence to balance possible interference from external actors, especially the rivaling Japan and the US. The US has been the predominant power in Southeast Asia and East Asia for so long, but the shifting of the US's focus on the region after the Vietnam War made its commitment to the region blurry (Sutter, 2004). On the contrary, since the 1990s China has been proactively engaging with Southeast Asian states, gaining it valuable opportunities to shore up influence in the region, and a peaceful rise strategy is potentially the strategic policy attempting to abrade American power in the region. The return of the US to the war against terror reignited China's alarm. The language of "Asia Pivot", coined in 2009 by Obama's administration, has been discoursed and challenged heatedly, and the implication becomes distinctive to China as the US has been increasing its presence in the region through new engagement policy and invigoration of military partnership with some major regional players. Evidence of Chinese unease with American renewed engagement in the region remains, and some

(5) Chinese Political and Strategic Control in Cambodia

China's foreign policy has been dominantly shaped by normative values of non-interference and respect for sovereignty, as illustrated in the five principles of peaceful coexistence. With that said Beijing is clear that territorial integrity and national sovereignty are the 'core interests' which are uncompromisable and must be protected at all costs. China is "willing to live in harmony with peoples the world over" (as Xi said) but "in matters that relate to sovereignty, territorial integrity, our attitude has been firm" (Tiezzi, 2014).

On the political front, China is earning more and more friends to echo its non-interference principle and "One China Policy". Beijing is seen to be keen on upholding these principles for two reasons. First, it is China's attempt to prevent any unnecessary interventions and criticisms from the international community led by the US regarding its internal affairs. Second, these principles allow China to stay firm when dealing with territorial issues such as Taiwan, Tibet, Xinjiang, South, and the East China Sea (Pengtakpitou, 2018). In this light, China needs a friend like Cambodia who is willing to pronounce active support for Beijing's principles. China has been considered a generous country that provides assistance to Cambodia. Recently China's development projects have been offered to aid the development of the kingdom with dam projects, road projects, and buildings projects. For instance, under the headline of Phnom Penh Post: PM Hun Sen lavishes praise on China, 2012. For instance, Cambodia's relations with Taiwan were severed in 1997 when China stepped in. The language of "One China Policy" appears frequently in official documents, and it is a popular phrase used by Cambodian broadcasting networks when it comes to the pronouncement of the government's stance toward relations with China.

The engagement strategy of China in the region requires support from regional states. Cambodia is, in this sense, a friend who could convey China's intention through proposal, initiative, and support. On the other hand, since China and some ASEAN members are wrangling in the South China Sea territorial dispute, China's interest would be to refrain ASEAN from reaching a united front against China when dealing with South China Sea dispute. China's stance in settling the territorial dispute with ASEAN members is to be based on a bilateral mechanism where China has more weight to influence the negotiation outcome (Symonds, 2012). More importantly, there is also a need to keep external actors like the US out of dispute because external intervention would jeopardize China's interests in the region. In this respect, Cambodia's membership in ASEAN is important for China to balance and prevent possible fallouts. To illustrate, Cambodia as the summit chairperson in 2012 released a statement, which is in line with China's interests, "not to internationalize the South China Sea from now on". Diplomatic support is also essential in bilateral relations. China might need Cambodia's allegiance on some sensitive issues. An illustrative case is the deportation of 20 Uyghur political asylum seekers back under Beijing's request in 2009 in the face of Western criticisms. In short, Cambodia, albeit small, is a perfect ally that could give China like-minded support on bilateral, regional, and multilateral platforms.

Complementary to the interests China has with Cambodia in broader ACFTA (ASEAN-China Free Trade Area), this section will elucidate the short and medium-term economic interests China has in relations with Cambodia. China's interests in the region as well as in Cambodia entail a wide array the most distinctive interest that China and Chinese investors see in Cambodia is the underexploited natural resources. China is in great thirst for natural resources such as timber, gas, oil, rubber, fertile farmland, and minerals including gold, silver, and iron ore. To date, (EIs, 2013), China demands, in greater amounts, important mineral ores such as iron, platinum, aluminum, and precious woods, all of which are gravely critical for China's export processing industries. In September 2013, China imported as high as 74.58 million tons of iron ore, a 15% increase compared to 2012. Besides, China consumed 42% of the world's copper trade at the beginning of 2013, and in the same year, China depended on 60% of iron ore imports for the country's steelmaking industry.

In Cambodia, China has invested mostly in garment, textile, agriculture, and, mining; and the bulk of Chinese companies have obtained licenses to exploit natural resources across the country. To raise an example, a Chinese company, known as Cambodia Iron & Steel Mining Industry Group (CISMIG), is planning to build a \$1.6 billion worth steel factory in Preah Vihear province. In addition to mineral ore, China is also a large consumer of timber due to the surge in demand for luxury furniture. In particular, China imported a total of 3.5 million cubic meters of hardwood timber, almost half of which (\$2.4 billion worth) originated from the Mekong region – including Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and Myanmar (EIA., 2014). As discussed, food security is very worrisome to Beijing due to the concerns of rising global food prices, scarcity, and the decline of Chinese agricultural land. To some degree, China needs Cambodia's vast fertile cropland to feed its people in the near future when the urbanization plan achieves its momentum. Parallel to the energy security strategy, Cambodia's prospect of an underwater oil reserve of 700 to two billion barrels is palatable to energy-thirsty China. In 2007, China National Offshore Oil

Company (CNOOC) was awarded the exclusive license for exploration and production (Reporter, 2007).

Besides natural resources, Cambodia's cheap and less protected labor is favorable for investors from China. Due to rapid social development and the increase in wages in China's eastern coastal provinces, many Chinese footloose and labor-intensive industries are moving to Southeast Asia, shifting China's competitive advantage from cheap labor (UN Data, 2014). People under the age of thirty comprise 68% of Cambodia's total population, one of the largest youth populations in Southeast Asia. With considerable cheap, loose labor law implementation and the current minimum wage of \$110 in the textile industry, Cambodia is economically an important investment destination where Chinese companies could exploit and gain handsome profits.

In 2020, Cambodian PM Hun Sen made a surprise and overnight-planned visit to Beijing amid the coronavirus outbreak in the country. In fact, PM Hun Sen originally wanted to visit Wuhan, the now-quarantined epicenter of the novel strain. PM Hun Sen told Chinese President Xi Jinping that he had decided to make a special visit to China with an aim to showcase Cambodia's support to China in the fight against the outbreak of the epidemic. President Xi told PM Hun Sen in their meeting that a friend in need is a friend indeed as the Cambodian people stand with the Chinese people during this critical moment. During the meeting, both sides agreed to continue high-level exchanges into 2020 and to uplift China-Cambodia relations to new heights. For a country whose appearances in the global press are constantly dominated by headlines about human rights violations and authoritarianism, this was a "play big, win big" situation for Hun Sen. Praise poured in from the director-general of the World Health Organization, the European Union and even U.S. President Donald Trump, who tweeted a rare "thank you" message.

According to the (Japan Times News), (Bong,2020) added, another big win for Hun Sen is that the COVID-19 outbreak and the Westerdam incident have momentarily diverted attention away from the European Union's latest decision to partially withdraw Cambodia's preferential access to its consumer market, which will affect one-fifth, or \$1.08 billion, of the kingdom's annual exports. Since the outbreak began, Hun Sen has turned the epidemic into a high-stakes political game, in which he has bet big (Bong, 2020). His consistent downplaying of fears about the virus, his decision to continue flights from China, his unexpected meeting with Xi, and his shrewd decision to accept the Westerdam's docking amid fear and criticisms from the Cambodian public appear to fit well in a loose thread of calculative moves. Hun Sen ultimately aims to win the hearts and minds of the domestic and global audience and to distract attention away from the EU's EBA decision and Kem Sokha's trial.

Meanwhile, Chinese investments and ODA have contributed greatly to Cambodia's development and the share of its GDP, however, there are some risks involved and concerns that Cambodia should take into serious consideration with regard to its relationship with China to ensure the winning outcomes over the long term. The quality, accountability, transparency, and sustainability of Chinese investments and infrastructure development projects, debt that Cambodia owes China, the lack of social and environmental impact assessment and safeguard measures of Chinese investment projects, and Cambodia's economic dependency on China, are

among some of the outstanding risks and concerns that have been raised by some civil society groups. However, the Cambodian government always asserts that all Chinese investments and infrastructure development projects have been made in a transparent, open, and inclusive manner, and Chinese debt is manageable.

2.2.4 New Decade of Cambodia and United States Relations

(1) Political Relations

Much as in 2010-2020, the status of U.S.-Cambodian political relations in the new decade of the 21st century can be categorized as strategically misaligned and plagued with a deficit in trust due to persistent issues of human rights and democracy. Bilateral cooperation stabilized and expanded in some practical areas of mutual interest, but disagreements on Cambodian domestic politics continued to deter deeper strategic engagement. Things started on a positive note when the first female U.S. Ambassador to Cambodia, Carol A. Rodley, began her tenure on January 20, 2009.

The general election had been held the year prior, and the CPP's power became more potent than ever before, with overwhelming control of 90 out of a total of 123 seats in the National Assembly (Cheunboran 2015). The 2008 election dealt a severe blow to the opposition SRP. The GDP growth stood at nearly 7%, and income was rising steadily. People got to enjoy prolonged peace and stability for the first time after two decades of internal strife. The border clash with Thailand proved timely, coming not long before the July vote and moving many to rally behind Hun Sen as he responded to Thailand's provocation. Seeing that his platform was losing appeal, SRP leader Sam Rainsy reverted to his chauvinistic tactics of attacking the premier's past relations with Vietnam.

In 2009, Rainsy stormed down to the southern border in Svay Rieng province, where he pulled out half a dozen wooden demarcation poles along the Vietnamese borders and then produced a false map to accuse the government of losing territory to Hanoi (Strangio, 2014). He was slapped with an 11-year jail sentence and forced into self-imposed exile again. The relationship between the United States and Cambodia hit another speedbump after the latter deported 20 Uighur asylum seekers to China. In response, U.S. lawmakers introduced the Cambodia Trade Act of 2010 (H.R. 5320) in November 2010, prohibiting the forgiveness of the Lon Nol-era war debt on which massive interest had accumulated without settlement since the 1970s (Thayer, 2012). During her first visit to Phnom Penh that same month, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton warned Cambodia that "you don't want to get too dependent on any one country," specifically targeting China (U.S. Department of State, 2019). To keep a balance between the United States and China, Cambodia, therefore, participated in the Lower Mekong Initiative (LMI), which eventually became a regional competitor to the China-led Lancang-Mekong Cooperation (LMC) grouping. Founded in 2009, LMI was part of President Barack Obama's "pivot" to Asia aimed at leveling the playing field against China's presence in the Lower Mekong Subregion. In 2010, the United States committed \$178 million to LMI's

funding, enabling it to address issues such as food security and water resources management in this particular part of Southeast Asia.

From 2010 - 2012, bilateral relations were mostly stable because Cambodia adopted limited bandwagoning with the United States by joining the LMI, maintaining internal stability, improving education and public health, loosening its grip on critics, and adopting piecemeal reforms. It was in late 2012 that ties began to deteriorate. (Shane, & Khouth, 2012), There was evidence of Cambodia's distancing itself politically from the U.S. as it began to suppress domestic opposition. During a meeting with Cambodian Foreign Minister Hor Namhong in Washington D.C in June 2012, Secretary Clinton pressed for the release of 13 residents of Boeung Kak Lake who had been arrested the month before for protesting their forced eviction by a development firm of CPP Senator Lao Meng Khin.

On November 19, 2012, U.S. President Barack Obama flew to Cambodia from Myanmar to attend the U.S.-ASEAN Summit and the East Asia Summit, marking the first visit by a sitting U.S. leader. Dogged by concerns among human rights advocates, Obama had a brief and "tense" meeting with Hun Sen, in which he pressed hard on issues of human rights, release of political prisoners, and a free and fair election (Spetalnick, 2012). Even though the meeting was tense and ended without a joint press conference, Obama's trip was arguably a big boost for the CPP's legitimacy, because it showed that after more than 20 years under its leadership, Cambodia had made commendable progress in domestic and foreign policy and that it had earned recognition from various world leaders.

Two contentious issues strained U.S.-Cambodian relations before the 2013 election. The first one was the expulsions of 27 opposition legislators from the National Assembly, whereas the second involved CNRP's exiled president Sam Rainsy, who had been disqualified from running for office by the NEC in late 2012. The reason was that the CPP had once again loosened its grip on democracy and allowed for a competitive election. Rainsy's return fueled excitement in the opposition movement, as hundreds of thousands of factory workers, monks, labor unions, students, urban voters, and marginalized groups who had been affected by corruption, land grabbing, and abuse of power by the ruling elites rallied behind the CNRP. The ruling party itself was concerned about a possible loss of control.

In 2013, the ruling CPP lost 22 seats in the National Assembly, having its portfolio slashed from 90 in 2008 to only 68. Meanwhile, the freshly minted CNRP captured 55 seats. This election had three implications for Cambodia and its foreign policy. First, it triggered another parliamentary logjam and posed a grave challenge to the CPP's domestic hegemony. For example, during the opening session of the 5th legislature, 55 elected CNRP legislators boycotted the ceremony to embarrass and delegitimize the ruling party (Chan Thul, 2013).

After one year of rhetoric, boycotts, and contentious negotiations, the two parties reached a power-sharing agreement in July 2014 that included three compromises. One, Sam Rainsy, who had not been disqualified from running for political office since 2012, would be able to take a seat in the Assembly. Two, CNRP deputy Kem Sokha would become the first

Vice President of the parliament. Three, chairmanships of parliamentary commissions and the NEC would be equally shared between the CPP and the CNRP. The second implication of the deal was that the post-election impasse sparked nationwide protest against the CPP as thousands of people took to the streets to demand Hun Sen's resignation. Third and more importantly, although the United States recognized the electoral result and applauded Cambodia for administering a more competitive vote, the election kick-started the beginning of a downward spiral in diplomatic relations between the two countries that persisted over the next six years.

In July 2015, the government started to crack down on people who disagreed with them by passing a law. Then, in October, two members of a political group were pulled out of their cars and hurt badly by people protesting near a government building. The investigation afterward showed that three important members of the government's security team were involved, but they were only put in prison for one year before being released and given higher ranks in their jobs. Between 2015 and 2017, around 25 members of the political group were either put in jail or had to leave the country. The tension got worse when the government kicked out a group called the National Democratic Institute in September 2017.

Between November 2017 and December 2019, the Trump administration took a number of punitive measures against the RGC in the hope of deterring it from backsliding further into authoritarianism, countering Chinese influence, and discouraging its hostility toward the United States. In September 2017, the White House announced the suspension of \$1.8 million to assist with the Cambodian election process. Then U.S. Senator John McCain (R-AZ) spearheaded a unanimous adoption of a Senate resolution (S. Res. 279) calling for the freezing of assets owned by all senior RGC officials and placing these individuals under the Specially Designated Nationals list (U.S. Senate, 2017).

So, the trajectory of U.S.-Cambodian political relations from 2009 to 2020 was much more turbulent than Chinese-Cambodian ties. Domestic politics strongly impacted the kingdom's behaviors toward the United States. This volatility reinforces the hypothesis that Phnom Penh distances itself from Washington around election times. Before the July 2013 general election, tension began to increase due to Cambodia's worsening human rights condition. President Obama's trip to Phnom Penh in November 2012 provided a rare opportunity for him to meet Hun Sen for the first time and to engage in a candid engagement. Although the 2013 vote was the most competitive process to date, the near-defeat performance of the CPP dominated the agenda of Cambodia's hedging toward the United States because regime survival became a grave danger threatening Hun Sen and his inner circle.

As a result, Cambodia orchestrated a prolonged diplomatic offensive campaign against the United States by siding closer with China, cracking down on domestic opposition, and criticizing alleged interventions into its internal affairs by the U.S. government. These escalations pushed bilateral ties to plummet to the lowest point since 1997. The CPP had to do everything to eliminate the CNRP, even though it had to jeopardize ties with Washington. It

was after the CNRP's dissolution in 2017 and the CPP's victory in 2018 that Cambodia began to mend its relations with the U.S. in an attempt to rebalance its hedging.

For its part, the United States seemed to be contemplating a détente because of the alarming geopolitical inroads of China in Cambodia. Although there remain several disagreements, Cambodia implemented limited bandwagoning toward the United States by allowing the reopening of VOA and by releasing Kem Sokha from prison. Tension eased further in late 2019 when Cambodia responded positively to the arrival of Ambassador Murphy, by adopting a softer tone and by proposing a fanfare celebration of the 70th anniversary of diplomatic relations. Meanwhile, Hun Sen welcomed President Trump's letter reaffirming U.S. commitment against regime change in Cambodia and accepted the invitation for a special U.S.-ASEAN summit in 2020. Cambodia's apparent rapprochement with the United States in post-July 2018 period indicates that its limited bandwagoning toward Washington fluctuates temporarily around election time, and it reverts to a more stable path after the ruling CPP wins.

(2) Economic Relations

Even though there was disagreement between Cambodia and the United States in politics during the 2013 and 2018 elections, they still traded a lot of goods with each other from 2009 to 2020. This helped both countries, and they kept their arguments to just politics. Cambodia needs the United States to buy their things, so they made sure to stay on good terms. In 2009, the United States said Cambodia was doing a good job with their economy and removed them from a list of countries that were not doing well (Vannak, 2019). This meant that American companies could invest in Cambodia and get help from the U.S. government. They also worked together on things like food and climate change. In 2016, the United States said that things made in Cambodia could be sold in America without extra taxes, which meant more things were sold.

In addition to trade, the United States remained a sustained source of bilateral aid, even though its generosity was lower than China's. Total U.S. aid to Cambodia increased nearly twofold between 2009 and 2010. It then remained steady at around \$70 or \$80 million every year until the Trump administration cut it by 75% in 2019 due to the deterioration of bilateral relations. Unlike Chinese aid that was targeted mostly at physical infrastructure, U.S. support had concentrated on six areas: Development Assistance (focusing on civil society, early education, human trafficking, political parties, and food security); Global Health Program (including reproductive health, STDs prevention, family planning); International Military Education and Training (fostering the study of English, military leadership and human rights training); Foreign Military Financing (including English-language training, vehicle maintenance, logistical management training, and maritime security); and Non-Proliferation, Antiterrorism, and Demining (Lum, 2013). The sixth area is the Economic Support Fund for the UN-backed Khmer Rouge Tribunal. Since 2008, the U.S. had contributed \$32.2 million to support the international side of the court along with \$9.8 million to sustain the operation of the Documentation Centre of Cambodia (DC-Cam), a non-governmental public archive

working to collect and store historical records related to the Democratic Kampuchea regime (ECCC 2020; Lum 2018). Furthermore, to address its war legacy, the United States provided Cambodia with \$133.6 million to support its mine-removing efforts and victim rehabilitation (Martin, Ben Dolven, & Lum, 2019).

Today, major U.S. brands operating in Cambodia include Chevron, General Electrics, Abbot Laboratories, Coca-Cola, and Starbucks. The constant increase in Cambodia's trade volume with the United States indicates the stability of its economic pragmatism element that does not vary due to the internal political process, specifically, the general election cycle. Although the 2013 and 2018 elections pushed its political ties with Washington into a downward spiral, economic links remained strong and grew substantially every year. The Trump administration cut 75% of aid to the RGC in 2019, but that amount was very minimal compared to two-way trade between the two countries that rose to more than \$5.44 billion in that very same year. That is because the U.S. market constitutes over a quarter of Cambodia's annual exports, and it is the largest single buyer of textile and footwear products. Any disruption in bilateral trade may pose detrimental challenges to the CPP's domestic legitimacy and result in social instability.

(3) Military Relations

During the time when Obama was the leader of the United States, Cambodia and the United States became better friends when it came to defense. They did things together like practicing how to help people who are hurt and saving things from the water. The United States also gave Cambodia some extra military stuff like special helmets and clothes that help people blend in with their surroundings. This all added up to be worth \$6.5 million.

Meanwhile, U.S.-educated RCAF officials led the Defense Strategy Working Group at the Cambodian Ministry of National Defense and worked in consultation with U.S. experts to draft the fourth iteration of a forward-looking defense paper (Stern, 2009). The high point came when the RGC opened a defense attaché office at its embassy in Washington, D.C., followed by an official visit of General Tea Banh to the Pentagon in September. Banh was warmly received by Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, who reaffirmed his commitment to helping Cambodia strengthen its peacekeeping, maritime security, and counterterrorism capabilities. Gates also invited Cambodia to participate in a Defense Policy Dialogue, which would establish a bilateral channel to cooperate on mutual security interests.

In 2010, under the State Department-led Global Peace Operations Initiative (GPOI), the two countries co-hosted an international peacekeeping exercise known as the "Angkor Sentinel," which involved 1,000 peacekeepers from 20 countries in command and post drills. The Angkor Sentinel later became an annual exercise between the RCAF and U.S. army. Also, the Cambodian and U.S. navies began conducting a joint exercise called Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training (CARAT). (U.S. Embassy in Cambodia, 2010), There were at least four port visits by U.S. Navy vessels such as the USS Tortuga in 2010, USS Stockdale in 2011,

USS Blueridge in 2012, USS Germantown in 2016, and hospital ship USNS Mercy, which conducted a 10-day program of medical checkups for nearly 30,000 Cambodians in 2010.

After a prolonged period of deepening military relations under the Obama administration, the RGC's domestic clampdown on the CNRP led defense ties to downgrade once President Trump took office. In January 2017, Cambodia unilaterally canceled the Angkor Sentinel exercise, citing preparations for the upcoming election and local war on drugs (Cheang, 2017). There were two reasons for this unprecedented decision. One, in addition to the deterioration of political ties, the CPP government downgraded military relations with the United States to further insulate itself from Western pressure caused by its crackdown on the CNRP. Two, the cancellation was intended to curry favor with China, with which the RCAF had held the first iteration of the "Golden Dragon" exercise in 2016. Still worse, reports about Chinese military installations at Dara Sakor and the Ream Naval Base added more alarm for U.S. military officials who saw Cambodia swinging drastically toward China in recent years.

Then in April, deputy Commander-in-Chief of the RCAF, Lieutenant General Hun Manet, attended the Pacific Special Operation Conference in Honolulu, Hawaii, where he discussed regional counterterrorism and met with Commander of the U.S. Special Operation Command Pacific, Brigadier General Jonathan B. Braga, to boost defense ties between the United States and Cambodia (Niem, 2019). In September 2019, Cambodia participated in the first ASEAN-U.S. Maritime Exercise (AUMX), which involved 1,260 military personnel from all ten ASEAN countries (Heydarian, 2019). Starting from Sattahip Naval Base in Thailand, the group sailed through the contested South China Sea before ending in Singapore. In fact, ASEAN had also held a joint naval exercise with China in 2018. Last, during Ambassador Murphy's recent meeting with Cambodian Defense Minister General Tea Banh, the two sides discussed the resumption of the Angkor Sentinel, the docking of U.S. Navy's vessels, and other military-to-military activities, even though the ongoing treason trial against Kem Sokha remained an impediment (Mech, 2019).

In summary, U.S.-Cambodian defense relations from 2009 to 2019 can be separated into two distinct periods. In the first period, which covers the entire Obama administration from 2009 to 2016, Cambodia consistently implemented its indirect balancing toward the United States through high-level exchanges between military officials, dockings of U.S. Navy vessels, joint land, and maritime exercises, and cooperation in other practical areas described above. In the second period, which stretches from early 2017 to late 2019, Cambodia downgraded its defense ties with the United States. It began to invigorate ties with the U.S. again after the CPP won in 2018.

This fluctuation challenges the hypothesis, which argues that Cambodia will distance itself from the United States politically and leave economic and military cooperation intact. However, it reinforces the argument that domestic politics does influence Cambodia's hedging between the United States and China. Moreover, this volatility sheds light on an unexpected and interesting dynamic in the pattern of hedging of a small authoritarian state. It indicates that, when faced with a critical internal threat to its survival, the CPP government is willing to shift

politically as well as militarily between two major powers in order to remain in office, even though such a decision bears high risk and that it has broad implications on the defense posture of Cambodia itself and the strategic landscape in Southeast Asia and the Asia-Pacific.

2.3 Research Limitation

This study will carry out, to know about the balancing of power between China and the USA in Cambodia's diplomacy framework. In Southeast Asia, Cambodia is a country that borders the Gulf of Thailand. Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam are neighboring countries. Cambodia's terrain is mountainous in the southwest and north and is dominated by the Mekong River and Lake Tonle Sap. In a constitutional monarchy, the government structure is a multiparty democracy; the chief of state is the sovereign, and the prime minister is the head of government. Cambodia has a mixed economic system, self-defined as a market-oriented planned economy. The economy, combined with centralized financial control and government control, entails several personal freedoms. Cambodia also is a member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), then ASEAN Community.

In 1955-2020 national census, Cambodia demographics (Demographics, 2020) has population 16,718,965. But in terms of the research limitation, will focus on the years (2010-2020) only. The researcher will emphasize "public policy," "public diplomacy," "dominant superpowers," "expansionism," and "balance of powers." The research study mainly focuses on verifying how Cambodia's foreign policy is shaped under the influence of China's aid. Put differently, the (IS) will examine whether Cambodia is receptive to China's support and whether this policy stance was excellent or harmful to Cambodia. The research will focus on Sino-Cambodia relations dating from 1997 up to the present regarding the analysis period. The year 1997 marked the diplomatic resumption between China and C.P.P.'s government. From 1997 to the present, the period will allow the thesis to capture momentum events in contemporary relations, transforming the relationship from an enemy to a strategic partner or so-called ally.

Regarding the analysis of Cambodia's domestic context, observation and content analysis will be employed due to approachability, budgetary, and time constraints, which do not permit the interview with incumbent officials and elite groups to gain full insights into the real scene behind the curtain. This text will also show the Cambodian policy, trying to balance two superpowers like China and the U.S. They used public diplomacy blueprint. Chinese and U.S. soft powers in Cambodia are enormously challenging; according to this issue, the (IS) will examine the effects of Cambodian development policy and the reasons that Cambodia's diplomacy uses the U.S. Balance with the influence of China.). Cambodia aimed for China to protect and help each other for the long term on the regional and international stage.

CHAPTER 3

Mechanism of Cambodia's Diplomacy for China-U.S. Balance of Powers

In this chapter, the researcher reported the findings of the documentary research results the first objective of this independent study is to analyze the mechanism of Cambodia's diplomacy for the China-U.S. balance of powers in the context of the most alarming geopolitical competition in the region. Cambodia's foreign policy towards the United States and China has been largely driven by domestic political dynamics, as well as other exogenous variables of economic, diplomatic, and security factors. Although Cambodia has been under the leadership of Prime Minister Hun Sen for more than three decades, he often streamlines and changes his policy based on cost-benefit analysis, where opportunities and challenges are limited by external factors and internal requests. Maintaining good relations with each of these countries is considered important for Cambodia. As such, it will be important to consider the challenges posed by these tensions and find a way to work effectively with each of the nations involved. Cambodia will therefore have to keep an eye on its neighbors while finding a balance between them, as well as between the United States and China. It must also balance relations with other American allies, such as Japan, South Korea, and Australia, which are the main donors to the economic and social development of Cambodia.

3.1 Cambodia's Diplomacy in Bilateral Relations with China and the United States

Weak governments have some strategic leeway in scaling up the growing fluidity and plurality of the international system. To maintain its independence and strategic autonomy, Cambodia has altered its foreign policy to respond to and manage rapidly changing landscapes and geopolitical trends. He will be able to live and prosper thanks to this. The state of bilateral relations between the United States and China is intricately linked to geopolitical competition. The normalization of relations between China and Cambodia dates back to the July 1997 incident, although China has gradually developed a relatively active engagement with the new royal government since its first general election in 1993. The July 1997 military conflict between two major parties and the main political leaders of Cambodia - Prince Norodom Ranariddh of FUNCINPEC and Hun Sen of the Cambodian People's Party (CPP) - has dramatically become the turning point of Sino-Khmer relations.

Since 1993, Cambodia's long history of struggle for stability and survival offers a fascinating insight into the evolution of the country's foreign policy. The author discovers that the strategic culture of Cambodia has two main characteristics. The author finds that Cambodia's strategic culture has two distinct traits. First, Cambodia's geographical location, located between two powerful and traditionally antagonistic neighbors, Thailand and Vietnam, has been a constant driving force in shaping the country's strategic course. This element continues to influence Cambodia's foreign policy, especially since the outbreak in 2008-2011 of border conflicts between Cambodia and Thailand. Second, when necessary and available, Cambodian leaders sought support and assistance from outside powers to deal with their difficult geopolitical

situation, as evidenced by Prince Sihanouk's acceptance of the French protectorate in 1863, the attempt of the Lon Nol regime to secure US military involvement soon after independence, and the strengthening of Democratic Kampuchea's alliance with China following the 1970 coup.

The choice of Cambodia was based primarily on the distribution of power between the major Asian powers, as well as the belief that the major powers in question were ready and able to provide credible support for the security and survival of Cambodia, as well as those of its ruling class. As China has grown in prominence as a regional and global force, Cambodia's northern juggernaut has become the kingdom's most crucial ally, at least for Prime Minister Hun Sen's dictatorship. Cambodia's strained ties with its neighbors, as well as China's growing importance in the survival of the Hun Sen regime, have brought Phnom Penh even closer to Beijing (Richardson, 2010). Beijing's reconciliation with Hun Sen was prompted by the fact that FUNCINPEC's performance had "not inspired confidence" and often disappointed due to Beijing's belief that FUNCINPEC leaders tended to seek help from outside the country, mainly in the United States. Hun Sen, on the other hand, remained dubious about Beijing's intentions, due to Beijing's historical support for the Khmer Rouge and its close relationship with the royalists (Chanda, 2010). As a result, while the CPP-Beijing connection gradually improved, the relationship remained weak and unclear. However, he posited that the "leitmotif of Beijing's approach to Indochina" has remained the current expression of China's historic policy of controlling its neighbors. Cambodia is a key player in rivalry the region's power balance with the United States.

As a result, over the past decade, China's influence in Cambodia has grown in all areas. With cumulative investments of \$10 billion and development assistance, including grants and concessional loans, of \$3 billion in 2014, China overtook the United States as the largest foreign investor and economic benefactor from Cambodia (Cheunboran, 2015). Cambodia was among the top 20 recipients of authorized Chinese foreign direct investment in 2010, according to Chinese authorities. Cambodia is believed to have been in the top 10 in recent years. Agriculture, infrastructure, hydroelectric projects, textiles, and mining are some of the industries in which China is investing. Cambodian-Chinese trade has also grown significantly in recent years, reaching USD 3.75 billion in 2014. In July 2016, during a meeting with Prime Minister Hun Sen on the sidelines of the 11th Asia-Europe Meeting in Mongolia, Chinese Premier Li Kegang offered USD 600 million for a three-year period from 2016 to 2018 (Paviour & Kuch, 2016). In 2020, bilateral commerce between Cambodia and China was worth \$8.118 billion, down 5.2 percent from 2019.

Table 1. Cambodia's Trade with China, 2010-2020

Years	Exports to China mainland (\$ million)	Imports from China mainland (\$ million)	Trade Balance (\$million)
2010	16.33	881.28	-864.95
2011	65.02	1,184.71	-1,119.69
2012	154.54	1,738.30	-1,583.76
2013	280.38	3,002.46	-2,722.08

2014	356.60	3,710.09	-3,353.49
2015	405.52	3,926.20	-3,520.68
2016	609.28	4,550.95	-3,942.67
2017	745.35	5,4949.86	-4,749.51
2018	982.99	6,761.45	-5,778.46
2019	101.86	7,5857.08	-6,573.21
2020	N/A	N/A	N/A

Source: Bong, 2020 and WIT, 2019

Meanwhile, to protect its economic interests, China orchestrated a cyber-espionage campaign through a group of state-linked hackers that targeted local politicians, diplomats, human rights activists, and public institutions to try to interfere in the 2018 general elections in Cambodia. This is a significant breach of friendly trust. According to the latest research from the Kiel Institute for the World Economy in Germany, Cambodia is now one of many countries in the world whose debt to China exceeds 25% of their gross domestic product (GDP) (Yeung, 2022). Cambodia must be wary of falling prey to China's debt-trap diplomacy, in which the country uses debt relief as a geo-economic instrument to force insolvent borrowers into making strategic concessions, such as deep-sea ports and air hubs, as in the cases of Sri Lanka and Zambia. Sri Lanka, an island nation of 22 million, is currently going through an economic and political crisis, with protesters defying curfews and government officials quitting.

Diplomatic Relations, according to (the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of China), Cambodia and China established diplomatic relations on July 19, 1958. The bilateral collaboration has been elevated to the status of "Comprehensive Strategic Cooperation Partnership in December 2010. In Beijing, China, on April 8, 2013, the two sides signed an "Action Plan on the Implementation of China-Cambodia Comprehensive Strategic Cooperation Partnership". The year 2013 marked the 55th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Cambodia and China, as well as the "Year of Cambodia-China Friendship". Cambodia is a supporter of the "one China policy". According to the Ministry of Commerce, bilateral trade between China and Cambodia was worth \$3.28 billion in 2013, \$374.30 million in 2014, and \$4.32 billion in 2015. Annual GDP per capita rose from \$300 in 2000 to \$1,300 in 2016. Cambodia and China have pledged to increase bilateral trade to \$5 billion by 2017. China and Cambodia signed a free trade agreement (ALE) on October 5, 2020. According to ASEAN Briefing 2020, in 2018, trade between the two nations totaled over \$7.4 billion, with China enjoying a trade surplus of over \$6 billion. The two countries hope to boost bilateral trade to \$10 billion by 2023 through the FTA.

The United States and Cambodia were suspended in July 1997, but in 2004 many restrictions were relaxed, facilitating more military-to-military activities with Cambodia. This has enabled the Cambodian military to adopt sound approaches to institutional growth, civil-military relations, human rights practices, and modernization requirements. In 2010, the exchange of officers, training programs, and the integration of Cambodian officers into multinational programs continued. However, in April of the same year, the United States decided to stop the shipment of 200 military trucks and trailers to Cambodia in an attempt to punish Cambodia's

actions following the involuntary return of Uyghur asylum seekers to China in December 2009. When the United States wanted to use diplomatic or economic tools in the arsenal to steer Cambodia in a certain direction or away from a certain action, China quickly filled the void (Cáceres & Ear, 2013. P.106). A few days after the American cancellation, China and Cambodia signed agreements estimated at around 900 million dollars. A month later, 257 military trucks from China arrived in Phnom Penh with 50,000 uniforms. When the United States announced that it would not cancel the \$300 million owed from the Khmer Republic era, China announced that it had canceled the multimillion-dollar debt accumulated during the same period

Despite the tension, both parties still wanted to maintain a constructive relationship. Around 1,000 people from 26 countries took part in the first Angkor Sentinel exercise in July 2010, which drew criticism from US-based Human Rights Watch. At the time, HRW issued a statement claiming that participating Cambodian military units were complicit in human rights abuses (Global Security, 2017). However, this training program which was a cornerstone of military cooperation between the two countries continued as planned each year until 2017, when the Cambodian government announced in January 2017 that the exercise would not be conducted in 2017 and 2018, citing national law enforcement efforts and political developments requiring armed force time and effort to be focused elsewhere.

Meanwhile, Cambodia-USA, economic cooperation, From 16 million USD in 1992 to 3.2 billion in 2016, trade between the two countries has experienced commendable development. In the past decade alone, two-way trade between the United States and Cambodia grew 60% to \$3 billion for the first time in 2013, and has remained above that figure ever since. Despite the occasional tug-of-war between Cambodia and the United States on the diplomatic and political front of the relationship, pragmatism has prevailed on the economic front, as the numbers indisputably show. In 2017, US foreign aid to Cambodia was \$96 million, down from a peak of \$123 million in 2014. According to the latest USCB corrected figures released on January 10, bilateral trade between the Kingdom and the United States was \$6.906 billion in 2020, up from more by 18.0% against 5.851 billion dollars in 2019 (U.S Department of State, 2021). Foreign aid from all sources now represents between 20 and 25% of the central government budget. Between 2018 and 2021, the United States spent approximately \$338 million on foreign assistance programs in the areas of health, education, governance, economic growth, and mine clearance. The trade balance between Cambodia and the United States. In 2020, the United States merchandise trade deficit with Cambodia was \$6.2 billion, up 28.9% (\$1.4 billion) compared to 2019

Table 2: Cambodia’s Trade with and Foreign Assistance from the U.S., 2010-2020

Years	Exports To (\$ million)	Import (\$ million)	Trade Balance (\$ million)	Development Aid (\$ million)
2010	2,300.8	153,8	2,147	80
2011	2,712.4	186.6	2,525.9	75.2

2012	2,619.6	226.4	2,465.1	76
2013	2,771.1	241.2	2,529.9	76
2014	2,847.8	328.1	2,519.7	70.9
2015	3,026.2	391.1	2,635.2	88.3
2016	2,813.7	360.7	2,453	108
2017	3,062.7	400.1	2,66.6	88.3
2018	3,818.2	445.8	3,372.5	21.81
2019	4,961.7	484.1	4,477.5	21.81
2020	343.9	6,562.4	6,218.5	50.0

Source: Lum; (Bong, 2020) (2010, 2013, 2015, 2018, 2019,2020), USAID (n.d.), and (United State Census Bureau, 2021)

The Kingdom receives approximately \$70 million annually for development assistance (civil society, political parties, mass communications, human trafficking, food security, nutrition, early education), global health programs (HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria, maternal and child health, family planning and reproductive health, nutrition), international military education and training (English language instruction, leadership training, military professionalism, human rights awareness) and non-proliferation, counterterrorism, demining and others (UXO and explosive remnants of war customs clearance, border security) (Lum, 2015) Cambodian on the United States intensified with the Prime Minister describing American democracy as "bloody and brutal" and accusing Washington to be the "third hand" interfering in Cambodian politics (Wallace, 2017)

Cambodia is counting on the continuation and development of trade between the two countries. The United States is expected to focus less on domestic Cambodian developments, and more on country-to-country, government-to-government relations. The perceived Chinese influence in Cambodia as a systemic factor will remain a constant in the background of relations for the foreseeable future. The impact of the 2018 legislative elections as a contextual determinant will depend on which path the United States chooses in the debate over Cambodia's position in U.S. strategy and corresponding action; pragmatic commitment or pursuit of values. For bilateral relations between China and the United States, as a weaker power, Cambodia is vulnerable to evolving geopolitical changes among major players in the international system. Given the high stakes and high-risk strategic competition in Asia today, reliance on China and alienation from the US and (its EU ally) can have serious consequences for its national security. Cambodia must learn the fatal lesson of its dependence on China in the 1960s and must do everything possible to

avoid going down the same path again. Cambodia should not be pro-China or a puppet of any country. Cambodia should always be pro-Cambodia.

Navigating the transition of power between the status quo power, the United States, and the rising power, China; and safeguarding its national security interests of domestic stability, sustainable and inclusive economic growth, and peaceful relations with all nations, large and small - all without having to join either of these superpowers in the train moving. First, Cambodia should diversify its political and economic ties with other like-minded small and medium-sized states that seek peace, free and fair trade, and collaboration. Second, Cambodia must reconnect with the United States, which has been deteriorating since 2017. Cambodia will be able to rebalance its position between Beijing and Washington thanks to this rebalancing

3.2 Cambodia's Diplomacy in ASEAN Relations with China and the United States

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) as a regional bloc examines Cambodia's relations with ASEAN until its accession in 1999. In addition, the item assesses Cambodian diplomacy in relations of ASEAN with CHINA and the United States in the political, economic, security developments, and the socio-cultural landscapes of Cambodia, as well as the roles of Cambodia in this regional organization. In particular, on the evolution of its foreign policy in the context of geopolitical competition between superpowers as a whole and others.

Cambodia joined ASEAN as the tenth member on April 30, 1999, following its status as an ASEAN guest from 1993 to 1995 and an ASEAN observer from 1995 to 1996. The path to this membership has been difficult as Cambodia had to face external and internal challenges. From 1970 until 1996. Nevertheless, ASEAN has played an important role in Cambodia's political conflict resolution and peace process over the past decade, even before joining the regional group, during the post-conflict, as ASEAN had been partly concerned about Cambodia's political instability which could cause region-wide instability.

ASEAN, which is a group of countries in Southeast Asia, took a stance in support of China and the United States during a conflict. When Vietnam got involved in Cambodia, ASEAN quickly asked for all foreign troops to leave Cambodia and for a new government to be chosen through fair elections (Emmers, 2003, PP.21). In 1979, ASEAN made a statement together asking for a plan to solve the problem in Cambodia. This plan included Vietnamese troops leaving, all fighting groups giving up their weapons, and having the United Nations supervise the election of a new democratic government.

Shortly after the UN-sponsored elections in 1993, Cambodia began to reactivate its membership in the international community as a fully legitimate state capable of pursuing a sovereign foreign policy. In the eyes of many states, however, Cambodia was still considered a least developed country (LDC), a poor, post-conflict country emerging from its recent past of tragedies and conflicts. It's political and security situation remained fragile at the time, after the departure of UNTAC. For example, the factional fights, however brief, that took place on July 5

and 6, 1997 between the two groups loyal to the first Prime Minister, Prince Ranariddh, and the second Prime Minister, Samdech Hun Sen. These gunfights forced ASEAN to suspend Cambodia's membership in the organization. However, since the end of the Cold War, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has become an increasingly indispensable part of Asian security architecture. Despite its subtle and obvious limitations, ASEAN is widely seen as one of the few enduring and functional platforms for institutionalized dialogue and cooperation in a tumultuous geopolitical landscape.

In this line, speaking on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of ASEAN, Chief Minister Prak Sokhonn, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Cambodia, stressed that "integration into an international community has always been the focus of Cambodia's foreign policy and national development strategy after long-term suffering from civil war, international isolation and economic embargo" (Prak, 2017). ASEAN has thus contributed to preparing Cambodia's return to the international community by strengthening its legitimacy and its image and by strengthening its diplomatic power since its accession in 1999.

Meanwhile, 2019 marks the 20th anniversary of Cambodia's membership in ASEAN. As a new member, Cambodia has been trying to catch up with other older members, especially in institutional reforms and human resource development. Public awareness of ASEAN remains limited due to the lack of public discourse and media coverage on ASEAN-related issues. Cambodia's interests and aspirations within ASEAN, which it joined in 1999, can be classified into three sectors

First, Cambodia thinks that being part of ASEAN is really important because it helps protect its country from other countries trying to take over or interfere. ASEAN has rules that all the countries in the region agree to, like treating each other with respect and not trying to control each other. Cambodia still believes that ASEAN is good for keeping peace and stability in the area, even though it was disappointed when ASEAN couldn't help solve some fights over borders between Cambodia and Thailand. Cambodia asked ASEAN to help, but Thailand wanted to talk directly with Cambodia instead. Thailand and Vietnam have a big influence on what Cambodia decides to do. After Cambodia got one of its temples recognized as a really important historic place, the trust between Cambodia and Thailand got even worse.

Second, ASEAN is a group of countries in Southeast Asia that work together to help each other with their economies. It helps Cambodia make friends with other countries in the region and beyond, so they can trade and do business together. One important trading system for Cambodia is called RCEP. Cambodia really wants the RCEP negotiations to finish soon. Cambodia also wants to work with other groups in the region, like the Cambodia-Lao PDR-Vietnam Development Triangle and the Greater Mekong Sub-region, to help each other grow economically. This is because Cambodia faces a challenge with its economy compared to other countries in ASEAN, so they want to work together to make things more equal. Cambodia has asked other countries in ASEAN to work together to reduce this difference in development, especially through the Initiative for the Integration of ASEAN (IAI).

Third, regarding socio-cultural interests, ASEAN helps Cambodia to promote and strengthen its national identity regionally as well as globally. Cultural identity has been one of the main national interests of Cambodia's foreign policy. Rich in historical and cultural assets, Cambodia has a comparative advantage to project its soft power within ASEAN through cultural diplomacy. In January 2019, the Asian Cultural Council (ACC) – whose secretariat Cambodia will host – will be launched. Cambodia plans to institutionally link ACC to the ASEAN socio-cultural community.

Also, after Yingluck Shinawatra's victory in July 2011 and the declaration by the International Court of Justice of a provisional demilitarized zone on July 18, 2011, tensions began to ease. The border military battles had at least three important strategic ramifications for Cambodia. First, the armed border conflicts reminded Cambodian officials that their country was still “harassed and intimidated” by its larger neighbors. Second, the violent skirmishes have caused Cambodian officials to reconsider ASEAN's role in maintaining regional peace and security. Due to ASEAN's inadequate approach to the Cambodia-Thai border dispute, Cambodia's confidence in the organization has diminished. Third, the “arrogance” and “aggressiveness” of Thailand's military and governing elite, combined with ASEAN's ineffectiveness in resolving the border dispute, has brought Phnom Penh closer to Beijing, whose influence is had already been felt in Cambodia.

In the context of growing tensions and uncertainties resulting from geopolitical competition between great powers, especially between the United States and China, in Southeast Asia, ASEAN has become even more relevant. Cambodia views ASEAN as an important shield to ward off adverse effects arising from power shifts and power contestation. ASEAN helps Cambodia diversify its strategic and economic partners as well as strengthen Cambodia's ability to offset security and economic risks and uncertainties. For example, in 2012, the Cambodian Minister of Defense proposed to his ASEAN counterparts the creation of a conflict-free ASEAN - due to fears that internal conflicts in some ASEAN member countries could lead to regional instability. He suggested that ASEAN consider creating an “ASEAN Security Connectivity” to better link security issues and security actors, which include both state and non-state actors, to better resolve complex regional security issues. However, these two proposals have not yet been realized due to a lack of leadership.

In simple terms, under Thailand's chairmanship in 2019, will focus on sustainable development, Cambodia is interested in creating synergies between its national development plan and ASEAN's sustainable development policy and United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. ASEAN is a group of countries in Southeast Asia. Cambodia, one of the countries in ASEAN, wants to work together with the other countries to achieve sustainable development. This means they want to make sure their country grows in a way that is good for the environment and for the people who live there. They have set goals to achieve this by the year 2030. Cambodia's division of becoming an upper-middle-income country by 2030 and a high-income country by 2050. They believe that working together with the other countries in ASEAN will help them achieve these goals. Cambodia has been planning for its development for many years, and one of their plans is to connect with the other countries in ASEAN to help

their economy grow. They want to attract foreign investment and sell more products to other countries. They also want to work together with the other countries in ASEAN to make sure that they have fair rules and that the focus is on helping the people.

Regarding the background of Cambodia's diplomatic relations, Cambodia has a special relationship with China, but some people think that Cambodia relies too much on China, both politically and economically. This has made it harder for Cambodia to have good relationships with other powerful countries like the US and EU. The South China Sea issue has always been one of the main agendas of ASEAN summits and related meetings and Cambodia has also been accused of kowtowing to China since 2012 as the joint statement could not be published. Some people say that Cambodia is too friendly with China because they wouldn't agree on a statement about the South China Sea. There are also rumors that Cambodia made a secret agreement with China to let them use their naval base. Some Western media and diplomats wrote about this, but the Cambodian government says it's not true. US officials are worried about China's military presence in Cambodia, but the Cambodian government says these concerns are not true.

In response to China's growing military influence in Cambodia, the United States on 8 December 2021, imposed an embargo on all arms exports and restricts dual-use technologies in Cambodia. This is because Cambodia has been trying to block important decisions made by a group of countries in Southeast Asia called ASEAN, and it has made some of its neighbors not want to be friends with it anymore. Cambodia is becoming too reliant on China, and this could make it even more isolated from other countries in the region. Some people think that ASEAN might not be able to work together if Cambodia keeps having the power to say no to important things.

Concerned about Sen's crackdown, the European Union allowed its "Everything But Arms" agreement with Cambodia to expire last year. EU tariffs have increased on Cambodian products precisely when Phnom Penh cannot afford them. U.S.-Cambodian relations have also suffered from Cambodia's poor human rights record and engagement with China. Cambodia's growing reliance on China for economic assistance is not without cost (Florick, 2021). In this case, the loans appear to be related to Cambodian diplomatic and defense cooperation. Chinese access to the Ream naval base would provide China with a staging station in the Gulf of Thailand, which could be used to support naval operations in the event of a crisis. Even if Cambodia wanted to, it will be difficult to leave China in the foreseeable future

From 1997 to 2013, before the announcement of the OBOR, the elevation of China-Cambodia relations was driven by China's economic success and its economy-centric foreign policy transformation. In the case of Cambodia, China's official development assistance, state-led FDI flows, and trade volume was necessary and affected the tone of bilateral relations, especially when the "exit policy" was launched in 2006.

In 2012, the two countries' bilateral relations were significantly enhanced in their geopolitical best interests as members of a "comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership". The escalating turmoil of the South China Sea territorial dispute since 2011 in the region has

deepened bilateral relations, especially as ASEAN countries seek stronger economic integration and coagulate a collective consensus on regional identity (Tai & Soong, 2014). With such a political and economic context, understanding the paradigm shifts of China's aid to Cambodia becomes the most explanatory evidence to prove the transition of China-Cambodia relations before and after the OBOR announcement.

But according to the study, Cambodia prioritizes its national agenda and interests, employs a risk mitigation strategy, promotes multilateralism, and builds an ASEAN-led regional architecture. At the same time, the pre-OBOR paradigm of Sino-Cambodian relations also faced issues such as the aid effectiveness dilemma, corruption, financial transparency, political dependence, and weak aid effectiveness in the accumulation of social capital. The implementation of (OBOR) has therefore come at a good time to change China's aid model and the way it plans to aid in the planned Belt and Road countries. It also changed China's aid model to Cambodia from a two-decade patron-client relationship to a common entity of development destiny based on the two countries' complementary competitive advantages.

Furthermore, demonstrating how the Hun Sen government demonstrated strong support for China's preferences over the years, the Cambodian government ordered the closure of the de facto Taiwan Embassy in Phnom Penh in 1997. In 2009, Cambodia deported twenty Uyghurs to China using a special plane sent by China, knowing that these individuals would be executed (Suy, 2020). When Cambodia was in charge of a big meeting with other countries in 2012, they didn't agree on a statement that everyone could sign. This was the first time in a long time that this happened. This was because the statement had some mean things to say about what China was doing in the South China Sea. It happened again in 2016 when Cambodia stopped another statement that was critical of China. Cambodia's government also didn't let people show the flag of Taiwan in their country. They did this to show that they support China and its policies.

In addition, the resolution of the conflict in the South China Sea will be a major obstacle to their relations in the next decade. China opposes multilateral talks and urged relevant governments to use the ASEAN-China mechanism to ensure full implementation of the South China Sea Declaration on the Conduct of the Parties, as well as for SEAN and China to continue to work together. To implement the South China Sea Code of Conduct, China has provided 16 tons of medical supplies to Cambodia. Others continue to regard Cambodia as a country ready to obey China's bids. In this environment, Cambodia should strive to maintain a balance of bilateral relations and foreign policy objectives with other nations, especially the United States, in order to diversify its strategic and economic partners for the benefit of its own security, sovereignty, and prosperity.

In the face of rising geopolitical rivalry and instability, driven mainly by the escalation of the superpower struggle, it is recommended that Cambodia pursues a multi-vector foreign strategy rather than focusing too heavily on a single power, according to Cambodia's current foreign policy from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation. Cambodia, being a small country sandwiched between two larger and more powerful nations, must maintain its foreign policy of perpetual neutrality and non-alignment. The country must pursue a policy of

peaceful coexistence with its neighbors as well as with other nations throughout the world. Cambodia should cultivate as many friends as possible, and it should understand how to treat superpowers as good friends since its main objective is to maintain political stability, peace, and social order in order to achieve human dignity, economic development, and poverty reduction.

3.3 Cambodia's Diplomacy in the New World Order's Balance of Powers

The government ministry is responsible for representing the Kingdom to the international community as it fulfills its role of supervising foreign relations, maintaining diplomatic missions in other countries, and providing visa services. Cambodia has established diplomatic relations with many countries. The (MFAIC) reports about twenty embassies in the country, including many of its Asian neighbors and those of important players during the Paris peace negotiations; including the United States, Australia, Canada, China, European Union, Japan, and Russia. Due to its international connections, various non-governmental organizations have helped meet social, economic, and civil infrastructure needs.

It's important for Cambodia to be very careful about how it interacts with other countries and makes decisions about its foreign policy. In the past, Cambodia had a bad experience when it didn't have clear plans for how to deal with other countries, and it ended up in a big war where many people were killed. But recently, Cambodia has been doing well in terms of its economy. It has been growing by about seven percent every year for the past twenty years, and it has gone from being a country devastated by war to a country where people are starting to have more money. This means that Cambodia has been successful in reducing poverty. In 1994, more than half of the people in Cambodia were poor, but now that number has gone down a lot. In 2018, only a small percentage of people in Cambodia are living in poverty. Cambodia also has a lot of young people, with about two-thirds of the population being under 35 years old. This makes it one of the youngest countries in Southeast Asia.

Cambodia perceives that the world order is in the transition towards multi-polarization or even a multiplex world where old and new global actors, state and non-state actors, are dynamically interacting and evolving along with a complex, uncertain and dangerous trend. To manage the geopolitical risk that has caused great concerns in Cambodia as well as in the region, Phnom Penh needs to address issues across at least three domains: domestic politics, international relations, and economic growth. Actually, Cambodia's foreign policy toward the United States and China has been driven by domestic political dynamics to a great extent, along with other exogenous variables of economic, security, and diplomatic factors. Although Cambodia has been under the leadership of Prime Minister Hun Sen for more than three decades, he rationalizes and often changes policy based on a cost-benefit analysis, where opportunities and challenges are limited due to external factors and internal demands.

Cambodia has not continually leaned toward China. This research adopts the risk-contingency and return-maximizing options of the strategic hedging model and analyzes how Cambodia's foreign policy shifted from strategic hedging to jumping on the bandwagon during the period 2010 to 2020. The "Foreign Policy Change" Cambodia's strategic cover to jump on

the bandwagon with China stems from Hun Sen's regime survival, the changing internal political dynamics, and the criticism and perceived interference of the United States in the internal affairs of Cambodia. The Kingdom of Cambodia pursues a foreign policy that protects and promotes its national interests by undertaking the following five tasks: (1) Protect national independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity, and neutrality; maintenance of peace, security, stability, order, and social unity. (2) Foster more friendships abroad based on the spirit of national independence. (3) Promote economic diplomacy. (4) Continue supporting and strengthening multilateralism. (5) Improve the quality, efficiency, and capacity of Cambodian diplomats (The Cove, 2021). However, the country remains a minor power in the region. With a comprehensive power score of 7.3 out of 100 in the 2020 edition of the “Lowy Institute Asia Power Index”. According to Prime Minister Hun Sen's virtual address to the United Nations, the General Assembly to learn more about the Kingdom's current outlook and its strategic vision for the future

Meanwhile, Cambodia believes that only multilateralism and rules-based international order are the keys to maintaining world peace, promoting shared prosperity, and addressing emerging global issues such as climate change, natural disasters, and pandemic diseases. No single country can address such interconnected and complex global issues. Therefore, international partnership and collaboration are required.

For example, Cambodia's economy, which together accounts for more than 70% of the country's growth and nearly 40% of paid employment—is being negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, according to Cambodia at the Time of COVID-19, the World Bank's most recent Economic Update for Cambodia, the economy is predicted to expand at its slowest rate since 1994 in 2020, shrinking by between -1 percent and -2.9 percent. In 2020, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) predicts even poorer economic growth for Cambodia, from 7% to -5.5% on average (World , 2020) and (ADB, 2020). As evidenced by the most recent COVID-19 epidemic, Cambodia is vulnerable to exogenous shocks and changes because of its open economy. Therefore, in order to get through this crisis and its related challenges, Cambodia needs to step up efforts to improve the flexibility and resilience of its economic and social structure.

Therefore, it is undeniable that Cambodia will prioritize post-Covid-19 economic recovery and growth. Economic growth has been the cornerstone of Cambodia's foreign policy and is sure to become more prominent and urgent after the pandemic. Economic development has been a strong source of legitimacy for the ruling party and the current government. Because the prioritization of economic growth will surely bring Cambodia closer to China, its closest ally, its largest investor, and its largest trading partner. Thus, Cambodia's foreign policy will continue to be seen as biased toward China and will cast doubt on the government's consistent claim that its foreign policy is neutral and interdependent, which in turn undermines Cambodia's standing as a country independent and sovereign.

According to Cambodian diplomacy, signifying its regional integration, the Kingdom of Cambodia became the latest member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations

(ASEAN) in April 1999. Since then, Cambodia has chaired ASEAN twice, the first time in 2002 and the second time in 2012. This year, the Kingdom will chair ASEAN for the third time. This is an opportunity to shape regional diplomacy and promote constructive dialogue. The (MFAIC) is committed to strengthening the centrality, unity, and development of the bloc in all areas while building resilience against growing geopolitical competition, transnational crime, terrorism, climate change, and infectious diseases. During the handover ceremony, Prime Minister Sen said, "As ASEAN Chair in 2022, Cambodia will lead ASEAN's collective efforts to accomplish our important tasks, especially to speed up the process of building an equitable, strong and inclusive ASEAN community". Ultimately, Cambodia adopts a strategy of diversification: maximizing friends while minimizing antagonists.

About Cambodian Foreign affairs to "New World Order and Balance of powers," addressing the closing ceremony of the annual conference, Prime Minister Hun Sen stressed that rules-based international order and multilateralism are under assault because of protectionism and unilateralism. Small and weaker states are becoming more vulnerable to fast-evolving global geopolitics to varying degrees. More recently, the 'Action Plan 2019-2023 on Building China-Cambodia Community of Shared Future' committed the two countries to undertake 31 measures in the five domains of politics, security, economics, people-to-people relations, and multilateral cooperation. It also agreed to promote ties between China and ASEAN by building a shared future in the region more generally. So, Public policy looked at from this perspective takes two forms. It focuses on the strategic interests of the countries that make up a region. For a region in recent history that has been dominated by intense rivalry among different states, a country-centered strategic approach could be seen as a zero-sum game. One country's gain would be another country's loss.

Meanwhile, Asia, particularly in the eastern part of the continent, was the main beneficiary of this change in the business practices of multinational corporations. Achieving a balance between national interests and international responsibility is a real challenge. For Cambodia, maintaining a balance and permanent neutrality in its foreign relations is not easy, but it is essential. Prime Minister Hun Sen said that we could achieve peace, stability, and prosperity only if we could protect independence, sovereignty, and neutrality.

Cambodia is hedging its bets on Japan for several reasons. Unlike the United States, Japan does not openly criticize Cambodia's record on human rights and democracy. Although Cambodia maintains close ties with China, mistrust between the two persists due to Beijing's past support of the Khmer Rouge and China's subsequent silence regarding the CPP's poor performance in the 2013 elections and the national outcry that followed (Leang, 2017). Another aspect of Cambodia's denial of China's dominance is its increased commitment to Japan's regional positions, where Cambodia has endorsed the joint ASEAN statement with Japan highlighting freedom of flight after China announced the ADIZ of the Sea from East China.

Now a consensus is emerging among economists and politician scientists that one of the important aspects of the change in the global political order is the gradual

withdrawal of the nation-state from the government. The nation-state is being squeezed from both sides. The space in which it currently operates is gradually being occupied by multilateral systems and local government systems. Multilateralism is taking various forms. It is taking the form of the transfer of some sovereign rights to multilateral organizations such as the United Nations Security Council and the World Trade Organization (WTO), under the 1995 Marrakesh Treaty which caused the WTO to supplant the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade. Under Chapter 7 of the United Nations Charter, the Security Council can authorize military action against rogue states. The WTO acts as a tribunal when individual states litigate against each other (Burki, 2011. P.21).

Cambodia-under close inspection there still remains the need for reforms in multiple sectors. The European Union provides budget and technical support to work on these challenges, whereby close cooperation goes far beyond development cooperation and also covers trade and investment. However, Heightening power competition and rivalries between major powers, foreign intervention and international sanctions are posing significant threats to international peace and stability. Cambodia is concerned that its independence and sovereignty are being undermined by some external actors – both state and non-state players – who have been interfering in Cambodia’s domestic affairs under the umbrella of democracy and human rights. Within such a context, the Kingdom has asserted many times that nothing is more valuable than independence, sovereignty, and self-determination.

It should be noted that the European Union (EU) had made a final decision on the Everything But Arms (EBA) trade. During a comment period, on February 12, 2020, the Commission adopted a delegated regulation on a temporary and partial withdrawal of the tariff preferences granted to Cambodia under the EBA agreement. The regulation entered into force on April 25, 2020, and fully took effect on August 12, 2020, after the absence of an official response on the EU requirements (Press release , 2020). The decision will, to some extent, affect the economic performance and political landscape in Cambodia as well as the geopolitical weight of the EU in the Kingdom. Meanwhile, this will be a blow to the Kingdom's garment industry, which has been one of the major beneficiaries of the deal since its inception in 2001.

In fact, the strategy of foreign policy in Cambodia was mainly fashioned and guided by “economic pragmatism”, which means adapting the foreign policy to the interests of economic development. The two principal strategies of the Cambodian government for regional economic integration are to transform the international environment into a source of national development and to diversify the strategic partnerships based on the calculations of economic interests. International economic cooperation and regional integration are the key principles of Cambodia's foreign policy, which emphasizes common development and win-win cooperation.

In order to create a regional community that closes the development gap and places regional cooperation at its center, Cambodia, the least developed nation in the area, has a keen interest in supporting and implementing a more inclusive, fair, and equitable process. To maintain dynamic economic development, regional integration, and national economic policy

must be linked. Enhancing regulatory harmonization and utilizing and working with various regional integration initiatives are important objectives. Projects within the ASEAN Community should be coordinated with subregional institutions for collaboration, such as the Greater Mekong Subregion Program (GMSP) and the Mekong-Lanchang Mekong Cooperation (MLC) as well. Ultimately siding with either of these two superpowers presents risks for Cambodia. Maintaining the 'ASEAN Way' and the centrality of ASEAN would better serve Cambodia's national interests and foreign policy. Therefore, what Cambodia must do is balance China and the United States simultaneously. Both China and the United States have a role to play. It is up to Cambodia to balance the needs of both superpowers and try to act in a way that satisfies both.

All in all, Cambodia employs a US-China foreign cover policy to enhance its political, economic, security, and diplomatic support. The United States and China contribute almost equally to Cambodia's economic growth. The United States is the largest buyer of Cambodian clothing and makes a lot of money Economic Markets China is Cambodia's largest provider of FDI and credit. Cambodia is also trying to balance military ties with military training and the two superpowers. Cambodia supports the China-led Lanchang-Mekong cooperation and the US-led Lower Mekong Initiative. Relations between Cambodia and the United States began to deteriorate after internal political factors in Cambodia changed following the elimination of the main opposition party, the CNRP, which supports the United States, see that is a threat to the survival of Prime Minister Hun Sen. The findings indicate that changes in Cambodia's foreign policy towards the United States and China are strongly influenced by domestic factors related to domestic political dynamics as well as other external variables In terms of economy, security, and diplomacy, most scholars assume that the relationship between Cambodia and China is within the relationship between clients and patrons. However, external factors cannot explain why Cambodia changed its foreign policy. But internal factors play a key role in that transition. Internal factors in Cambodia have not always been stable, with the CPP dissolving the main opposition party into the CNRP, thus adopting a different approach to foreign policy. This research applies and applies the potential risk and return maximization options of the strategic hedge model to illustrate the shift in Cambodian foreign policy from hedge to hedge. Cambodia's monopoly takes steps to limit the scope of economic pragmatism and indirectly balance both the US and China, to avoid being overly dependent on the two superpowers. Therefore, Cambodia has implemented a policy of rejecting dominance by strengthening ties with Japan. Diversification of the economy with the European Union and ties with ASEAN.

CHAPTER 4

Cambodia's Diplomacy in Balancing Process of China and US Powers

In this chapter, the researcher reported the findings of the documentary research and in-depth interview on the second and third objectives of this research which is to analyze patterns of Cambodia's diplomacy in the balancing process between China and U.S. powers. The researcher will remain express and reflect on some of the involved elements in the context of Cambodia's diplomacy as a challenge to the interference of internal Cambodia of the U.S. and the expansionism of China's power, and her survival maintains. Meanwhile, Chinese strong expansionism arrived with negative impacts on the political, sociocultural, environmental, and socio-economic spheres inescapable. However, this has provided the government with a means of evading pressure from the West over issues of democracy and human rights. In exchange, Cambodia has backed China's main regional objectives, particularly Beijing's assertive South China Sea claims and China's expansion vs. U.S. interference in Cambodia.

4.1 Effects of China's Expansionism and U.S. Interferences Process on Cambodia

As a consequence of the small state standing in the middle of the two superpowers, Cambodia sits squarely in China's widening orbit and demonstrates the degree of dependency and democratic decline that can result from the widespread influence of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Over the past two decades, Beijing has developed emotional ties with the ruling Cambodian People's Party (CPP) and its paramount leader, Prime Minister Hun Sen, who has ruled the country in various capacities since 1985 (Chandara, 2014). This relationship has been based on the convergence of strategic objectives and goals interests between the two governments. As evidence, China has been argued as Cambodia's "strong performer and most reliable friend in terms of investment and aid." From the early days of the peace talks between the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) and the Beijing-backed pro-Sihanouk rebellions, China gradually began its investment and poured a huge aid package into Cambodia until today.

China has been helping Cambodia with their infrastructure and energy, which are important areas for the Cambodian government. China's policy of not interfering with other countries could be attractive to Cambodia, especially during political crises. This has made their relationship stronger and improved their confidence. China has given Cambodia investment and financing without requiring them to make certain changes like Western countries usually do. However, some people are concerned about the negative impacts of Chinese businesses on other countries. Even though there are positive effects in Cambodia, there are also negative impacts in areas like politics, culture, environment, and economy. For example, China's investment in certain areas of Cambodia has caused problems. This paper looks at the effects of Chinese investment in Cambodia and the involvement of the United States in Cambodia's affairs.

Additionally, because of "the crowding-out effect of Chinese FDI on domestic investment, the decline in outward FDI in traditional sectors, the increase in the service sectors

that are ignored in the current model, the small percentage share of FDI in each country's GDP as well as the types of sectors in which Chinese FDI is concentrated". Kubny and Voss have also researched the effects of Chinese foreign direct investment on local businesses and workers in Cambodia and Vietnam (Kubny & Voss, 2010). They examined the impact of Chinese investments on employment and income, training, spillovers, and linkages. Their research revealed that the investment's benefits are modest, with little impact on pay rises, little training being absorbed, and little connection between domestic and Chinese businesses.

Shinn (Shinn, 2016) also did a study to look into how Chinese investments in Africa can affect the environment. According to the study, Chinese investments contributed to a number of environmental issues, including deforestation, noise and air pollution, oil leaks, and deteriorating sanitary conditions. The livelihood of those who rely on safari tourism might be impacted by Chinese developments in the area. Although it is a significant source of money for the community, further mining in the area would have a negative impact on the hundreds of millions of dollars-worth of tourism business, according to one of the sources listed above. P. Heng carefully examined how the Kamchay Dam in Kampot, Cambodia, affected the neighborhood. His research revealed that this dam-building project has some advantages, including project-based employment prospects, lower electricity costs, and improvements to the local infrastructure (Pheakdey, 2017). However, the project has significant negative effects on the environment, including loss of the primary source of income for the local communities, destruction of the forest, grave dangers to endangered species, and water contamination.

Likewise, Tuman and Shirali examined the political and economic impact of Chinese investment in Latin America and Africa. Using data from 66 countries between 2003 and 2010 (Tuman & Shirali, 2017). Their study found that China's FDI achieved two goals in Latin America and Africa: The first was access to those countries' natural resources, and the second is to use it as a tool to punish those who endorse Taiwan diplomatically during the study period, Chinese investment has increased in countries that have severed diplomatic ties with Taiwan. Chheng also analyzed the political economy of Chinese investment in Cambodia. The analysis focused on economic, social, and political implications and concluded that "while creating job opportunities and income. But some Chinese projects in hydropower dams and land concessions have an impact on local people's livelihoods and the environment" (Chheng, Vannarith, 2017). Economic performance and development results especially in terms of infrastructure development and employment opportunities to gain public support and votes. As a result, "Cambodia tends to act and act strategically and comfortably in the interests of China if it does not directly harm the interests of Cambodia itself." Therefore, Chinese investment in Cambodia Thus, it appears to have greatly benefited the ruling class at the cost of China, Social and environmental impacts on local communities.

This study is distinctive in that it uses a particular case study to systematically examine the effects of Chinese investments in Cambodia. The arguments are based on actual occurrences in the region where Chinese investments have been made. Meanwhile, Cambodia plans to boost economic growth to keep up with the Southeast Asian economy. And it aims to prepare for regional economic integration by the end of 2015 (ASEAN Economic Community,

2015). Infrastructure and electricity appear to be the main drivers. However, these needs are not covered by traditional donor agendas. But China as a new donor, China is an "excellent performer" for Cambodia in terms of aid, according to Jin Sato.

Recently China has been expanding its foreign aid program dramatically. According to the first Chinese white paper on foreign aid, published in April 2011, China increased its foreign aid expenditures by an average of 29.4 percent over 2004–2009 (Information Office of the State Council 2011: 5). Partly due to such a dramatic increase, China is often categorized as being one of the most important of the so-called “newly emerging donor countries.” (Sato & Shimomura, 2013, P. 87)

Jin Sato, on the other hand, sees Cambodia as an internal bridge linking China to the region through a number of sub-regional economic frameworks of the Mekong region and sub-region. Of course, China could benefit from Cambodia's geographical ties to other coastal areas, from the region through the port of Sihanoukville. The port of Sihanoukville in Sihanouk province appears to be a geopolitical location on the Gulf of Thailand for a Chinese naval base to strengthen its stronghold in the region during times of crisis and protect it. The sea is rich in oil, gas, and other underwater resources, and it is no less important to say that the port is strategically located in the center of the sea route between Africa and Asia. This is because China's oil and gas are regularly shipped from Africa and the Middle East. Many of the projects are focused on the Special Economic Zone (SEZ) of the province of Preah Sihanouk, as part of a strategy to transform Cambodia into a regional economic hub. While these investments have contributed to the development of the country and Sihanoukville in particular, negative impacts on the local population and communities have resulted from corruption and other factors.

However, it is evident that China's expansionism is always growing because, between 2012 and 2017, it invested over US\$15 billion (£12.36 billion) in building Cambodia's infrastructure, including US\$11 billion in the energy sector alone. Ports, airports, and roads/expressways were also included in the infrastructure. The 12-kilometer Sihanoukville Autonomous Port (PAS), Cambodia's only international and commercial deep seaport (where about 90% of the country's imports and exports transported by sea pass through), is connected to Phnom Penh by a US\$1.9 billion (£1.57 billion) expressway. Sihanoukville is a port city and a popular tourist destination (Devonshire-Ellis, 2022).

An enormous influx of Chinese capital into Cambodia over the past few years has led to a sharp rise in the population of Chinese nationals in this Asian nation. The focus of Chinese investment projects has recently migrated to Sihanoukville, a seaside province of Cambodia, from the capital city of Cambodia, Phnom Penh. Chinese migrant workers and businesspeople are becoming more prevalent in Sihanoukville, raising concerns about the effects of Chinese investment initiatives. Although it is clear that Chinese investments have had a favorable impact on job prospects and infrastructure development, they have also given rise to a number of problems that have garnered attention in both domestic and foreign media.

With hundreds of billions of dollars in fresh investments in its neighbors, China is confronting American President Barack Obama's foreign policy "rebalance" towards Asia with a strategic vision to match its still sizable economic might. Xi is working behind the scenes to overtake America as Asia's regional power even as he makes a historic visit to the US this week. He wants to be viewed as Obama's equal in the global arena (WASHPOST, 2015).

Negative Effects of Chinese Investment in Sihanoukville and Lower Sesan 2 Dams

This analysis purposes to assess the impacts of Chinese investment in Cambodia by drawing on data in the form of new reports, commentaries, analyses, and articles published on different media platforms and in academic journals. Taking Sihanoukville and Lower Sesan 2 Dams as a case study of impact reflections, the analysis shows that, despite economic benefits, Chinese investments have significant negative impacts on Cambodia as a host country of foreign direct investment. Political, socio-cultural, environmental, and socio-economic aspects of the impact are covered. The report closes with recommendations for how China and Cambodia may move forward to make sure that Chinese investments in Cambodia have positive rather than negative effects.

Sihanoukville: Chinese investment in Cambodia has caused big changes in a beach town called Sihanoukville. It used to be quiet, but now there are lots of Chinese casinos, hotels, and factories there. The town has about 160,000 people and many of the businesses there are owned by Chinese companies. The Sihanoukville Special Economic Zone is a special area where Chinese businesses can operate without paying taxes. There are over 100 factories in this area, and most of them are owned by Chinese companies.

The first highway in Cambodia is being built for \$1.87 billion as part of a build-operate-transfer agreement to increase connectivity between Sihanoukville and Phnom Penh. In Sihanoukville, the capital of the province, the number of high-rise buildings climbed at the quickest rate ever in 2018 after 238 buildings, up from 188 buildings in 2017 (Vireak, 2019). The geopolitical rivalry between superpowers and the ongoing globalization of Cambodia's domestic politics might both heighten macroeconomic risks linked with an excessive reliance on China. Chinese FDI mostly targets the finance and real estate sectors, which are usually susceptible to outside factors and boom-and-bust cycles. When domestic credit in the construction industry increases, financial stress also increases. When the dynamism of the geopolitical struggle between superpowers is discussed, Cambodia is frequently characterized politically as "being bought" or as a "vassal state of China."

Although Chinese investments have contributed significantly to Cambodia's economic growth, the benefits of the Chinese currency are not widely shared with the local population. It appears to have benefited certain privileged sections of Cambodian society, owning land or doing business in the service of the Chinese people. And instead of hiring local workers, many Chinese companies tend to import them from China, causing resentment among the Cambodian

people. Observers say Chinese companies like Chinese workers because they find it easier to work with, and the same thing to work ethic.

Likewise, a report released by the Cambodian Interior Ministry shows that more than 250,000 Chinese currently live in the country. That's over 60% of all foreign residents in Cambodia. Chinese workers, in most cases, are offered higher wages than Cambodians, experts say. Sophal Ear, an associate professor at Occidental College in the US, told DW there is growing concern about Chinese dominance over the local economy. He added that Chinese investments, despite economic growth, had a negative impact as a significant portion of the money went to casinos and real estate, facilitating financial crime and money laundering (CTN News, 2019). Moreover, some Cambodian officials admit that all is not well with the influx of Chinese immigrants. Meanwhile, the Cambodian National Police website quoted Sok Phal, State Secretary in the Ministry of Interior, as saying that of the Chinese citizens living in the country, more than 78,000 reside in Preah Sihanouk province and only 20,000 have work permits. The ministry said that from 2014 to the end of July, more than 2,700 Chinese citizens were deported

To evaluate the potential risks to local development processes, we examine the effects of Chinese investment in the manufacturing, hospitality, and entertainment sectors. The city's infrastructure appeared overwhelmed: roads were often flooded during the rainy season and garbage was accumulating on street corners as collection services were not able to cope with the increase in population. The municipal government of Sihanoukville is expected to handle much of the urban planning and development tasks. However, it has been overwhelmed by the influx of Chinese investment and lacks the resources (human and financial) to control the city's rapid growth. For example, the provincial administration lacked information about the ongoing economic activity or the number of foreign citizens living in its territory. Due to the government's limited power to control construction activities, new buildings are springing up along the coast like mushrooms. The problems listed above are the results of uncontrolled urban expansion (lack of urban planning and excessive pressure on infrastructure and services). The local administration of Sihanoukville does not have sufficient resources to conduct inspections and monitor the construction of new structures. These are important and involved with the effectiveness of local government, must be strongly paid more attended in a whole of the city development area.

Because the Cambodian government had already approved and divided a decentralization process by transferring powers. In late 2000, Cambodia began a decentralization process by transferring power from the central government to the local government. Local governments have responsibility for some tasks (waste management, water, and sanitation), with more functions identified for handover in what has been a slow process (Eng & Sophal, 2016).

The introduction of 70 casinos, financed by Chinese cash, began in Sihanoukville, Cambodia, in 2016. Chinese companies, including security firms, opened to serve Chinese tourists, driving out the locals in the process. Along with increasing crime and prostitution,

Sihanoukville was also plagued by chaos and squalor. Chinese investment focused mostly on constructing hotels, casinos, and restaurants while ignoring other issues including sewage, waste management, and expanding the city's roads and electrical infrastructure (Graceffo, 2020). Both Khmers and other foreigners found the city to be uninhabitable, and they departed in record numbers. In July 2019, a Chinese construction project in Sihanoukville, Cambodia, collapsed, killing 26 people. The locals were already irate at the Chinese businesses and tourists who were encroaching on the town and displacing the residents. The building fall was perceived as another illustration of the Chinese people's blatant disrespect for the locals.

Beijing ultimately exerted pressure on Prime Minister Hun Sen to permit the Chinese to seize the city in the first place, and it was Beijing that persuaded him to restrict online gambling, which ultimately led to the collapse of the city's economy. The case of Cambodia is a prime illustration of how Chinese investment, particularly through the Belt and Road Initiative, results in client governments that are then pressured to abide by Beijing's demands. Additionally, the increase in crime, the eviction of residents, and the environmental destruction were all factors that led international observers to see the Chinese-driven boom in Sihanoukville adversely. The Chinese retreat, which left a smoking crater of trash, debt, and abandoned construction projects, has caused almost as much damage.

Lower Sesan 2 Dam: The Lower Sesan 2 Dam (LS2) is predicted to have disastrous effects on the Lower Mekong as well as the entire Royal Kingdom of Cambodia in addition to having a significant detrimental influence on the Sesan and Srepok Rivers in northeastern Cambodia. To avoid this, we implore the Government of Cambodia to immediately direct the project developer to halt construction, disclose all pertinent data, and conduct a more thorough Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), while assuring the participation of all stakeholders, particularly the affected local communities, and seriously consider the results of the EIA, rethink the project but there are no answers.

According to the new law, less than 800 homes in northeastern Cambodia will be impacted by the Lower Sesan 2 Dam (Trandem, 2013). On the other hand, according to a report titled "Best Practices in Compensation and Resettlement for Large Dams," the project will have a severe impact on the lives and food security of tens to hundreds of thousands of people in Cambodia who reside upstream and downstream of it.

Significant transboundary effects of the Lower Sesan 2 Dam are anticipated in the Mekong River Basin. The dam will eliminate 9% of the fish biomass in the Mekong Basin, according to a 2012 research that was published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences. The dam is anticipated to lower 6–8% of the sediment loads in the Basin, which are crucial for the productivity of the Mekong Delta, riverbank gardens, and other floodplains, according to the International Centre for Environmental Management, which has studied sediment flows in the area. The full hydropower development of the Sesan, Srepok, and Sekong rivers, including the Lower Sesan 2 Dam, will significantly alter water levels in the Tonle Sap Lake and will have a greater impact on the Lake than the Upper Mekong hydropower cascade

in China, according to research published in 2012 by the Journal of Water Resources Planning and Management.

(1) Political Effects: Cambodia turned away from the United States and its allies in the late 1960s, turning towards China for economic and strategic reasons. Following General Lon Nol's overthrow of Prince Norodom Sihanouk in 1970, there was a deterioration in bilateral relations. China made a bold decision to aid the Khmer Rouge in its struggle against the Lon Nol administration, which was backed by the United States. The Khmer Rouge regime carried out widespread atrocities after assuming power in 1975, killing 1.7 million Cambodians. Later, China helped the Khmer Rouge and other Cambodian factions fight the Vietnamese rule of the country from 1979 until 1989. In 1979, China even engaged in a border conflict with Vietnam in retaliation for that country's involvement in Cambodia.

Sino-Cambodian relations have improved significantly since the late 1990s after more than 50 years of ups and downs, and economic growth and national sovereignty are key national concerns influencing Cambodia's foreign policy towards China. It was Cambodia's first strategic alliance when it signed a comprehensive strategic cooperation agreement with China in 2010 (Chong, 2017). The general consensus is that China, as a trustworthy friend, can support Cambodia's development and help it catch up with its neighbors, strengthen its independence, and sovereignty, and enhance its role and reputation on the regional and international stage. Compared to its two main neighbors, China is still seen as the strategic balancing force of Cambodia with Thailand and Vietnam.

As a result, when countries have good relationships with each other and work together, it helps to make sure that Chinese companies feel accepted and protected when they invest in those countries. This is especially true for companies that are owned by the Chinese government. The way a country acts in its relationships with other countries is influenced by its own politics and economy. Right now, Cambodia is mostly focused on growing its economy and helping people who are poor. China has been giving Cambodia a lot of money since 2010. One government official even said that without China, there would be no Cambodia today. So, even though we don't want to show that we like China more than other countries, it might be a good idea to accept their help if it helps us achieve our goals.

(2) Socio-cultural Effects: The Sihanoukville case demonstrates the difficulties in balancing social and environmental sustainability with urban design at the municipal level. The "Chinese silo," where Chinese businesses invest in land speculation or concentrate on industries that appeal to Chinese consumers, balances out job growth and greater commercial opportunities. The problems brought on by a sudden influx of Chinese investment cannot be handled by Sihanoukville's local government since it lacks the resources to do so. It finds it challenging to uphold the rights and safety of its citizens as well as the Chinese nationals who reside and work in Sihanoukville.

Many have warned Cambodia about China's debt-trap diplomacy in light of the significant inflow of Chinese investments, loans, and aid. Smaller nations are now even more

in debt and in danger of losing their sovereignty as a result of the Chinese credit model, which is frequently characterized by opaque contracts, outrageous interest rates, predatory loan practices, and unethical business dealings (The ASEAN Post Team, 2018). Additionally, the financial inflow from China is frequently "closed-looped," providing local players with few worthwhile opportunities. Chinese businesses frequently transact with other Chinese businesses, which then employ Chinese citizens.

When lots of people from China visit a place called Sihanoukville, they usually go to restaurants and hotels run by Chinese people. This means that local businesses and people don't get as much money as they could if the visitors went to their places. This has made some people upset because they feel like their town is becoming too much like China and they're not getting a fair chance to benefit from the visitors. Some Cambodian people who don't have their own land are also being left out of the town's development plans while more and more Chinese workers are coming to work there.

Associates of the large influx of Chinese investors, particularly in Sihanoukville, may be responsible for the rise in crime and violence in the impacted areas. Numerous instances have been covered by the media. For instance, in the middle of 2017, six Chinese males were charged with sexual assault and kidnapping after allegedly forcing two masseuses into a taxi. When the Cambodian motorbike taxi drivers vehemently requested the release of the two Cambodian women, their plot was foiled. The Chinese men ambushed the Cambodian cab drivers before about 100 other Chinese men entered the battle, each brandishing metal bars and other metal weapons like knives and swords. Many Cambodians were seriously hurt ⁶² (Po & Heng, 2019).

In this story, a woman is hurt really badly in a parking lot near a casino. Her head is bleeding and a lot of people are watching, but they don't know what to do. Some people think about using their phones to call for help but decide not to. One woman tries to check if the hurt woman is still alive, but she doesn't see any signs of life. After the police leave, an ambulance comes to help. The ambulance workers carefully lift the woman onto a stretcher and put her in the ambulance. This all happened in a place that used to be peaceful and popular with tourists, but now there is a lot of violence and chaos from people who are drunk.

Seven towns will probably be flooded as a result of the construction of the dam, according to the EIA for the Lower Sesan 2 Dam, which was carried out for the original design in 2008. This will need the relocation of at least 4,754 peasants from 1,052 families across 4 communes (key Consultant 2008) in (Kura, Zhang, Mekonnen, & Ringler, 2015). According to Baird (2009), a minimum of 38,675 residents in 86 settlements along the Sesan and Srepok Rivers will be unable to access a significant portion of their fishery resources. His research also indicates that the Lower Sesan 2 Dam will prevent 87 additional settlements on tributaries of

these two rivers from accessing migratory fish. 78,000 people who reside upstream of the dam are anticipated to lose access to migratory fish overall (Baird, 2009).

There has been a continuous rise in vices and criminal activity to go along with the migration of Chinese labor and tourists. In contrast to other nationalities, Chinese individuals made up 68 percent of those detained in Cambodia during the first half of 2018. In order for authorities to project and protect against the numerous negative impacts and changes, social and cultural impact assessments and studies must be conducted in addition to environmental impact assessments.

(3) Environmental Effects: The project has been the subject of sometimes fierce criticism, most recently in a report by Human Rights Watch, which received extensive coverage in the local, regional and international media. The report exposed planning and implementation failures related to consultation and impact mitigation, which resulted in violations of economic, social, and cultural rights, including the displacement of almost 5,000 people to substandard resettlement sites and payment of inadequate compensation, as well as impacts on the livelihood of tens of thousands more upstream and downstream (Mahanty, 2021). The company said it employed more than 2,000 local people during construction. In September 2021, the company told local media that around 110 Chinese and 100 Cambodians were employed in the operations.

In addition, the dam significantly altered the circulation of water and fish in the Srepok and Sesan rivers, with implications for the wider Mekong basin. Forests have been cleared in areas inundated by the dam's reservoir and beyond. Conflicts over land and fishing between local communities have intensified since the project due to a large influx of immigrants during and after the dam's construction. There is friction between Bunong parties in an area claiming land titles from native communities and the Stung Treng provincial government. Involuntary resettlement has significantly disrupted community livelihoods, cultural ties to customary lands, and intra-community relations. Villagers reported being intimidated by the army and police during episodes of active resistance to the dam. The villagers identified a lack of transparency on the part of the government and the company during the resettlement negotiations, which did not respect international safeguards, including those that protect the rights of indigenous communities.

On the other hand, many semi-developed countries are characterized by difficult conditions to overcome. The different pace of development of each sector raises a debate on the resource needs and the imbalances exposed. Problems such as environmental pollution and urban-rural differentiation accompanied by rapid economic growth have led to the disappearance of the overall economic balance.

As resource use and development intensifies, competition for resources also intensifies. For example, in order to develop hydroelectricity, the development of forests, fields, houses, roads, and railways was blocked, and people's lives were destroyed. If measures

such as compensation are not appropriate, development itself cannot continue. Guarantee industrial zones, competing with original land, Fishing use, and compensation will be important, etc (Sato & Shimomura, 2013.p.20).

This project is testing a gender impact assessment for the A Luoi and Srepok 3 dams on the Sekong and Srepok rivers. The long-term objective of the project is to better take into account the gendered impacts of hydroelectric development in the “3S” river zone.

The natural resources of the 3S river basin are very important, not only in terms of environmental conservation but also to guarantee the food security and livelihoods of the more than 17,000 people who live in the region and who depend on resources natural. However, 3S Rivers and their communities are now under threat due to rampant and unsustainable development, particularly the construction of numerous dams (Oxfam, 2015-2016).

(4) Socio-economic Effects: Chinese investment projects typically start quickly and yield returns quickly, according to the ruling class of Cambodia. More significantly, the projects support Cambodia's needs for development (Chong, 2017). More than 1 million members of the local workforce will benefit directly from the investments in the form of job possibilities and revenue production. About 700,000 Cambodians work in the garment sector, which is primarily supported by Chinese companies.

As part of a plan to turn Cambodia into a regional economic powerhouse, many of the projects are concentrated on the Lower Sesan 2 Dam and the Special Economic Zone (SEZ) of Preah Sihanouk province. Despite the fact that these investments have helped the country and Sihanoukville in particular thrive, corruption and other issues have had a negative influence on the local population and communities.

A tide of Chinese tourists, businesspeople, and workers arrived alongside the enormous influx of Chinese cash. Given that the province has a total population of only 150,000, Sihanoukville added 120,000 tourists and 78,000 permanent residents from China in 2017 (Alffram, 2022). This large-scale influx of Chinese nationals upended the social and economic foundation of the neighborhood, with detrimental effects that will last for a long time.

Most of the lowest-income Cambodians have been forced to leave their homes and neighborhoods due to rising land prices due to the country's strong demand. By the time the Chinese began settling in Sihanoukville, the ruling class, their families, and the local aristocracy were already occupying large estates. However, most Cambodian small businesses have gone bankrupt and their owners have fled the region in search of work abroad. It is estimated that 80-90% of businesses in Sihanoukville will be owned by the Chinese by 2020. Organized crime and their Chinese bosses followed the wave of investment and made Sihanoukville the crime capital of Cambodia. Reports of weapons, drugs, money laundering, human trafficking, child labor, prostitution, widespread violence, and general insecurity have put people in Sihanoukville apart, fueling anti-Chinese sentiment across the country.

Some people in Cambodia have made a lot of money by selling property. In 2010, the government made rules to limit how long people can lease property to 55 years, but some people have found ways to get around these rules. They can do this by using other people as representatives or by buying citizenship. It is not very expensive for rich people to become citizens legally. There are still big problems with who owns land, especially with factories, industrial areas, and new neighborhoods outside the city. Many people have lost their land and are very sad about it. The courts in Cambodia are not fair, and people do not trust them. China is owed a lot of money by Cambodia, and this has caused Cambodia's debt to grow a lot. But even with these problems, Cambodia's economy is still growing very fast and is doing better than other countries in Southeast Asia. The World Bank thinks Cambodia's economy will grow by 6.9% this year.

Just over a year ago, The Sydney Morning Herald and The Age traveled to Sihanoukville to investigate the scale, scope, and impact of Chinese investment in the city and its place in the broader Chinese initiative Belt and Road, valued at \$1 billion. Over the past year, China's grip on Sihanoukville has only deepened. Recently, Chinese Defense Minister Wei Fenghe said his country is willing to deepen military exchanges and cooperation with participants in the Belt and Road Initiative, a comment that has hurt critics comfortable.

According to a recent Wall Street Journal article that used a leaked copy of a draft agreement between Cambodia and China, the two countries recently agreed to allow China access to the base, which is about 25 kilometers from Sihanoukville and was constructed by the USA 25 years ago. According to the source, China would have access for 30 years and be able to post personnel, stockpile weapons, and station warships. For the benefit of both navies, China would construct two additional piers, and dredging would be done to make room for its greatest battleships.

US officials have also pushed for Cambodia not to allow China to use a huge new airport being built by a private Chinese company in Dara Sakor (about 40 miles or 65 kilometers west of Ream in Koh Kong province). Although it is located in a sparsely populated area, it would be the largest airport in the country and could accommodate huge airliners and long-range bombers (Massola, 2019). The Journal's report on the proposed military base sparked a storm of protest from Cambodia and China. Cambodian leader Hun Sen called it "fake news" and argued that the country's constitution prohibited the presence of foreign troops. China has denied military ambitions in Cambodia.

However, given that Cambodia is at the bottom of the value chain and only contributes a small portion of total production, the spillover benefits of Chinese investments, notably in technology and knowledge transfer, are minimal. The focus of these investments has been on the labor-intensive clothing sector, where factories use cut-make-trim techniques, and national resource extraction, such as mining and hydropower plants, which don't create many jobs for locals. Furthermore, these investments do not improve the ability of regional businesses to join the global value chains.⁴³ (Chheang, 2017) Some Chinese investment initiatives, particularly

hydropower plants and land concessions that have violated labor rights and environmental protection, have caused local communities to express their displeasure. Nearly 5,000 people will likely be evicted from their villages when the dam's reservoir fills, and the nearly 40,000 people who reside along the banks of the Sesan and Srepok Rivers stand to lose the majority of the fish they depend on for food. But this endeavor is a small piece of China's far greater plan (WASHPOST, 2015).

So, in terms of managing development partners, we draw attention to the RGC's capacity to utilize a variety of partners and distribute the work among them. This is relevant to the BRI since infrastructure development is involved. In this area, there are no immediate causes for concern. According to a recently released report titled "Best Practices in Compensation and Resettlement for Large DAMS," plans to build a sizable hydropower dam close to the confluence of the Sesan and Srepok rivers in Sesan District, Stung Treng Province, may be poorly advised given the project's poor feasibility process, which has not adequately considered the project's negative environmental and social impacts and the needs of affected communities living up and downstream of the proposed dam-site.

Some people in Cambodia have criticized the investments from China because they believe it has led to corruption, bad leadership, violations of human rights, harm to the environment, and a lack of transparency. While China's investments are important for the country's growth, some experts think that China's approach to distributing and using the money has made things worse. They say that China mainly focuses on benefiting the government and political elites, rather than helping the average person in Cambodia. Because of this, many people in Cambodia are not happy with China's involvement in their country.

4.2 Cambodia's Diplomacy in Balancing Process of China-U.S. Powers Rivalry

The devolution in power and growing competition and strategic rivalry among major powers have generated regional uncertainty and volatility. The relative decline of US supremacy and the rise of China and India in Asia has resulted in a rapid change in the global power structure that has a direct impact on the Southeast Asian states. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) faces a formidable challenge to maintain internal unity and coherence in the highly contested era of great power politics. Sino-US geostrategic competition forces its member states to take sides, especially on critical regional issues, such as the South China Sea (SCS) maritime disputes, in which China has used divide-and-conquer tactics.

As one of the smallest and least developed countries in the region that is highly dependent on political support and economic opportunities from China, Cambodia faces the dilemma of maintaining ASEAN centrality. At no diplomatic cost to its key ally Beijing. ASEAN and China are almost equally important in Cambodia's foreign policy. Yet Cambodia's deep political acceptance of China has raised regional concerns that China must be beholden to Beijing's strategic interests at the expense of regional interests. The internal discord also raises major concerns about the group's future in maintaining its centrality in shaping the larger regional architecture of the Indo-Pacific.

The article discusses Cambodia's foreign policy in the context of geopolitical competition in the developing Indo-Pacific regional order and domestic political difficulties exacerbated by Western pressure to advance human rights and democracy. The concept of small states was important in international relations at the height of the non-alignment movement. The article highlights four main motivations for Phnom Penh's deep political embrace of Beijing, including the balance between its neighbors, ASEAN's limited role as a safe haven, economic dependence, and most importantly, regime survival in an environment of “neopatrimonialism and dynasticism” Policy.

Although Cambodia has strong economic and political ties with China, this does not mean that the country has put all its eggs in one basket. In a context of growing geopolitical and geo-economic uncertainty, Cambodia is increasingly positioning itself between the United States, China, and regional institutions. Cambodia was the first Southeast Asian country to register support for the Japan-led “free and open Indo-Pacific”, an initiative Phnom Penh sees as complementary to ASEAN-led regional mechanisms.

Economic diversification is also in full swing. A year after signing a free trade agreement with China in October 2020, Cambodia signed another agreement with South Korea in October 2021. Cambodia is exploring the possibility of negotiating bilateral trade agreements with other major economies such as Japan, India, and the Eurasian community. While China remains Cambodia's largest investor and trading partner, the United States and the European Union remain the country's two main export markets, especially for textiles. Cambodia seeks to maintain preferential access to both Chinese capital markets and commodity markets without giving up access to both markets.

In addition, Cambodia, which ever fell victim to great power politics in the Indochina War between France and the United States, has had a bitter experience in its relations with the superpowers. It shows Hun Sen's determination not to give in to foreign interference in regional politics, especially if he is pushed into the arms of China or the United States. A pragmatist, Hun Sen minimized risk by protecting economic ties with the United States, China, and Southeast Asia, while maximizing international cooperation by seeking to implement “internal reforms and foreign friendship on an independent basis”. The ongoing reform of foreign affairs institutions and capacity building have produced remarkable results. Implement a diversity strategy while promoting open and inclusive multilateralism and a rules-based international order.

Although Cambodia has limited material resources and rich experience of foreign intervention, it is not entirely without agency. The fluidity of alliances, the diversity of major powers (China, India, Russia, and the United States), and the growing role of regional institutions such as the European Union and ASEAN in the international system give Cambodia strategic leeway. You can continuously adapt your foreign policy to a rapidly changing geopolitical landscape with increased tensions between the US and China and negative economic trends. Maintaining independence and strategic autonomy is an uphill battle for a

small country like Cambodia. Despite Cambodia's close relationship with China, remaining non-aligned is a way to cope with a new era of economic complexity and geopolitical turmoil.

For example, Cambodia's foreign policy over the past year has been largely influenced by the worldview of Prime Minister Hun Sen, who has more than four decades of practical experience in diplomacy and foreign affairs. Understanding Cambodia's foreign policy, including his decision to co-sponsor a UN resolution condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine, means understanding Hun Sen's pragmatic decision-making. At the World Economic Forum in Davos in May 2022, Hun Sen said Cambodia had no intention of picking sides in the U.S.-China rivalry, despite mounting pressure from major powers (Chheang, Cambodia hedges, 2022). But he acknowledged that Cambodia faces challenges posed by volatile geopolitical competition. To address these challenges, Hun Sen supports multilateral initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative and Japan's "Free and Open Indo-Pacific," a strategy to promote regional peace and prosperity that is not aligned with third countries and thus consistent with its centrality ASEAN.

However, the Cambodian government has repeatedly stressed that it has no intention of joining a big country, that it will never allow any foreign military base to enter its territory, and that it adheres to a foreign policy of permanent neutrality and non-alignment. Despite these assurances, the media and international observers have tended to present Cambodia as a vassal state of China. According to (Vannarith, 2019), PM- Hun Sen, This perception does not reflect the full dynamics of Cambodia's foreign policy and harms the country's image and international role. The tough approach of the European Union and the United States against what they call a "democratic backsliding" in Cambodia partly reflects their own strategic interest in ensuring that Cambodia is not too closely aligned with China.

This external environment has forced Cambodia to invest heavily in foreign policy. During the 41st Congress of the ruling Cambodian People's Party in December 2018, foreign policy was highlighted as an area requiring more attention. Cambodia's foreign policy outlook is shaped by the ongoing power shift and the effects of competition among the great powers in the Asia-Pacific region. As the world becomes multipolar, Cambodia adjusts its foreign policy objectives and strategies accordingly. In this new world order, Cambodia's ruling elite believe that the direction of the country's foreign policy cannot be separated from the Asian powers.

Under unprecedented pressure from the West, Cambodia has limited foreign policy options. Cambodian ruling elites generally believe that the double standards imposed by the European Union and the United States are unfair to Cambodia. They wonder why the EU and U.S. are targeting Cambodia, while Vietnam and Thailand remain on good terms with the West. They also questioned why Cambodia has been attacked for its close relationship with China, while other Southeast Asian countries are doing the same. Although, Cambodian diplomacy is a "long-standing policy" to maintain domestic security and economic development within the framework of the "ASEM and ASEAN". The summit will be one of the most important and prestigious political events in contemporary Cambodian history. It can present itself as an open, multilateral, and modern country, considering that the EU only partially withdrew its trade

preferences for Cambodia after the decline of democracy under the "everything but arms" regime in at least developed countries. One point is especially important.

This is an example of the challenges facing Asia-Europe relations, as they reveal differences in culture, political understanding, and social models, as well as what democracy means and means. There is one central aspect of European thought and its foreign and security strategy, namely democracy. European foreign policy is people-centered and based on peace, prosperity, and democracy. Europe's overall approach is thus based not only on pragmatic assessments but also on idealistic aspirations, as outlined in the European Union's Global Strategy for Foreign and Security Policy, titled: Shared Vision, Shared Action: A Stronger Europe. This led and still leads to tensions between the EU and Asian countries.

ASEM runs counter to the global trend of rising nationalism, populism, and economic protectionism reflected in the current policies of the US and China. In this challenging environment, the Kingdom of Cambodia had host its first summit in Phnom Penh on 16-17 November 2020. The official theme of this year's summit is "Strengthening multilateralism for shared growth" (Schmücking, 2020). It deeply reflects Cambodia's needs: foreign markets, joint climate action, and a post-development strategic partnership framework with the EU. Cambodia now has the opportunity to be a bridge builder between Asia and Europe. The platform has developed from a purely diplomatic multilateral platform to a multi-level and multi-field dialogue platform. It focuses on strong sustainable economic cooperation that goes beyond development aid, fair and equitable world trade, open economies, and a vision of stability and security.

In a broader context, there are three main reasons why ASEM plays an important role in the current international environment. First of all, it is an important platform for Eurasian countries to deepen mutual understanding and strengthen ties. In addition, the United States is not a member of ASEM, which can strengthen Europe's global leadership and constructive cooperation in areas such as climate change, cybercrime, and connectivity. Second, ASEM brings together levels from heads of state to civil society activists, allowing for sharing and compartmentalization at multiple levels. Third, it is a commitment to a rules-based multilateral world order. Meanwhile, Phnom Penh has signed only two strategic partnerships so far: one with China in 2010 and one with Japan in 2013. Cambodia sees China and Japan as its most important strategic partners and can count on them to help Cambodia achieve its development goals. The vision of becoming an upper-middle-income country by 2030 and a high-income country by 2050. Cambodia also attaches strategic importance to ASEAN, which it sees as critical in promoting regional integration and helping Southeast Asian countries fend off foreign interference.

Diversifying strategic and economic partners has been the mantra of Cambodian foreign policymakers for years. The lack of coordination between relevant ministries such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MOFAIC), Trade, Economy and Finance, Defense, and the Cambodian Development Council remains a major problem and may not prevent Cambodia from continuing with your diversification strategy. These ministries

must work together to implement a stronger foreign policy. Likewise, one scenario is for the Cambodian government to show goodwill and move toward a real restoration of credible democratic conditions in Cambodia. This would be a strong signal to the EU, its member states, and citizens, and go beyond factual arguments such as how many NGOs or media there are in Cambodia, and criticism of double standards. It would also show that Cambodia is developing its democratic model combined with a market economy, as enshrined in its constitution. Another situation is that there is an unresolved conflict of values and perceptions between the EU and Cambodia.

On the other hand, we will see the Cambodian government refer to its non-negotiable sovereignty and non-intervention values. This is an important and often challenging role. Set the agenda, lead the discussion, listen to participants, and try to keep everyone equally happy. This is true multilateralism. As a bridge builder, Cambodia has the ability to constructively shape ASEM and defend its strong interests in the rules-based world order, the fact remains that Cambodia needs it. Otherwise, the bridge between Asia and Europe will degenerate and the wall will continue to exist. "Economic pragmatism" (the combination of foreign policy and economic development interests) has shaped Cambodia's foreign engagement since the turn of the century. The Cambodian government believes that globalization and regional integration are essential to advancing its national economic interests. Cambodia actively participates in regional and sub-regional mechanisms, such as ASEAN-led multilateral mechanisms and small Mekong-related multilateral mechanisms.

The fourth phase of the government's rectangular strategy (2018-2023) sees the transformation of the global economy to East Asia as a "golden opportunity" for Cambodia to develop and improve its industry, production, and services. The integration of Cambodian production networks in the region, the development of infrastructure connectivity, and the facilitation of cross-border flows of goods, services, capital, and data are important foreign policy tools. ASEAN, along with China, Japan, and South Korea, are Cambodia's most important economic partners (Cambodia, 2018. p.1).

While its external environment affects Cambodia's economic performance, internal factors are just as important. Ongoing economic reforms and human resource development have been the backbone of Cambodia's excellent economic performance over the past two decades, with a growth rate of around 7%. Foreign policy plays a key role in protecting and promoting Cambodia's national interests, including peace, economic security, and cultural identity. One of Cambodia's foreign policy goals is to provide citizens with equal economic opportunities by optimizing the country's natural and human resources. Facilitating economic diplomacy is one way to achieve this goal, but there will be obstacles along the way. The growing asymmetry of power with China poses risks and constraints for the country. Chinese influence, along with concerns for human rights and democracy, is challenging Cambodia's efforts to expand economic ties with the West. The European Union has partially withdrawn Cambodia's 20% duty-free and quota-free trade deal under its "everything but arms" scheme in response to clear human rights abuses and democratic regression. US pressure on Cambodia on these issues is also likely to increase under the Biden administration.

In a rapidly changing global and regional economic landscape, filled with uncertainty and volatility, it is critical that nations ensure economic security and survival. Samdech Techo will speak at the MFAIC annual conference on March 7, 2019. Prime Minister Hun Sen reiterated that "economic diplomacy" is a priority of Cambodia's foreign policy, as it plays a key role in the sources of economic growth and diversification of trading partners (KCMFAIC, 2019). Therefore, through its economic diplomacy, Cambodia can maintain its economic vitality and resilience and increase its prestige and influence on the international scene. Furthermore, the implementation of Cambodian economic diplomacy will strengthen and improve its foreign policy to protect its fundamental national interests while ensuring its own economic prosperity.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation has launched "Economic Diplomacy" to further promote trade, investment, tourism, and the development of Cambodian cultural identity. This is a key step in the institutionalization, systematization, and modernization of its foreign economic policy. It is also the first time that economic diplomacy has been placed at the center of Cambodia's foreign policy. Prime Minister Hun Sen has always advocated open, inclusive, and rules-based multilateralism. For example, as an open economy, Cambodia is vulnerable to external changes and shocks, as evidenced by the recent covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, Cambodia needs to redouble its efforts to increase the resilience and responsiveness of its economic and social systems so that it can overcome this crisis and the challenges associated with it.

In addition, the national consensus is that economic security is national security. It is increasingly agreed that Cambodia can only remain independent if its economic base is solid. To build a resilient economy and society, the government plans to develop a shock-responsive social safety net, increase health spending, educate the workforce, encourage high-quality investments, and develop infrastructure that is resilient to climate change. It will also launch a policy framework for the digital economy in 2021 to seize the opportunities offered by the fourth industrial revolution. Cambodia needs to devote more resources to building the capacity of government officials, business people, journalists, and students. Leadership, inter-agency coordination, policy implementation, and public-private partnerships are key to realizing the vision of Cambodian economic diplomacy.

All in all, Following the Sino-U.S. competition, Cambodia has come to the attention of many due to a rumored agreement giving the Chinese military access to a significant naval station. But for Phnom Penh, the Beijing partnership is about striking a balance between Vietnam and Thailand. Beijing generously rewarded Cambodian loyalty. For many years, China has been Cambodia's largest source of international investment. Today, there is more foreign investment in Cambodia than in all other countries combined. Major projects include dams, thousands of miles of roads, bridges, and free trade zones. Once a coastal city, Sihanoukville is now considered a neighboring Chinese settlement, dominated by Chinese investment, immigrants, and tourists. Despite having one of the worst business environments in Southeast Asia, Cambodia has the fastest-growing economy, thanks in large part to all of

China's attention. In terms of trade, the USA and the EU are Cambodia's main export markets. But China is Cambodia's most important trading partner due to the huge amount the latter imports from the former. Beijing is also a major source of aid and arms for Phnom Penh. Cambodia's foreign policy is particularly concerned about the already damaged relationship between Cambodia and the United States, possibly due to the close relationship between Phnom Penh and Beijing. The United States will continue to play an important role in Cambodia's foreign relations, so it is essential to improve bilateral relations. This would lead Cambodia to adopt a more balanced foreign policy towards the two superpowers, an ideal stance for a small country like Cambodia.

4.3 Cambodia-ASEAN Diplomacy in Balancing Process of China and U.S. Powers

To explain the dilemma Phnom Penh had to face in managing its relations with Beijing without harming the interests of ASEAN members. Based on empirical analysis, the article aims to examine Cambodia–ASEAN diplomacy on China's growing and U.S. influence on Cambodia's foreign policy on the centrality of ASEAN in the changing regional order where competition among major powers significantly affects the strategic options of the small states and how it influences the internal politics of Cambodia and how to balance with great powers.

Their foreign policy options. In this way, it contributes to a better understanding of the foreign policy of small states and its connection with domestic policy. The article concludes that as small states strategically rely on multilateral institutions like ASEAN and align with major powers for their security and prosperity, Cambodia currently leans more towards China than ASEAN, thus weakening ASEAN. Centrality between Chinese efforts to create divisions within the regional bloc, and domestic politics is the main driver of Cambodia's foreign policy directions.

Combined with its entanglement strategy, ASEAN adopts a hedging strategy vis-à-vis China. A hedging strategy is needed because ASEAN is deeply concerned about the potential negative consequences of China's rise, especially with regard to its security and maritime interests. In other words, ASEAN is uncertain about China's future intentions and behavior. This uncertainty prompts ASEAN to guard against China's rise by maintaining close relations with other major powers, particularly the United States, where US and ASEAN interests converge. Both are concerned about China's rise, want to maintain regional peace and stability and share the rules of free navigation and the free flow of maritime trade on which much of Asia's economic success depends. The main issue causing ASEAN to worry about China's rise concerns the disputes in the South China Sea (SCS).

The US-China rivalry has now permeated the global psyche to such an extent that their strategic rivalry threatens to escalate over time into an all-out war. All Western media predict their relationship will continue to deteriorate over time as the two sides make new friends and allies around the world. Some of them, mainly in developing countries, have had to make difficult decisions about which side to choose. Some people don't do it at their own risk. The centrality of ASEAN aims to draw major powers such as China, the United States, and Japan

into the ASEAN framework through different layers of multilateral organizations such as the Asian Summit of East and the ASEAN Regional Forum. Southeast Asian states force these outside powers to follow ASEAN rules and reduce their predatory behavior through the ASEAN-centric approach. In addition, Southeast Asian states can provide diplomatic mass and persuasion to outside powers by seeking political consensus among ASEAN states.

The future of ASEAN is challenged internally by the way ASEAN intends to manage its internal affairs in order to maintain its relevance, its *raison d'être* and the ease with which the ASEAN approach resolves the internal grievances and other cross-border issues between Member States; externally, the EU's ability to respond effectively to changes in the world in the post-COVID-19 era. The most critical existential threat to the future of ASEAN is how to manage the troubled bilateral relationship between the United States and China, arguably the most important relationship in the world, with global impact and including the ASEAN. As ASEAN charts its course in the Indo-Pacific, it must resolutely confront a variety of regional and global challenges with exceptional leadership if it is to uphold its image and demonstrate its ability to drive reliability for peace and stability. And the prosperity of the region. In particular, ASEAN must show leadership at a time when views on issues such as the South China Sea remain uncertain, and amid broader regional and global trends that cast doubt on the centrality and ASEAN unity.

Cambodia, one of the ASEAN countries closest to China, is often accused of kowtowing to China. It is closely related to China's economy, military, education, and culture. He has great insight into BRI projects. He called his debt to China “manageable” and downplayed the South China Sea issue at the ASEAN Forum. Although the country officially defines itself as “neutral and non-aligned”, as Kin Phea, director of the Cambodian Institute of International Relations, puts it, China's presence is so overwhelming that it not only creates tension with the United States dissatisfied (Kin, 2020).

China and ASEAN started the 21st century with a relationship of goodwill. In 2003, China became a party to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) in Southeast Asia, which helped to improve ties between the countries. In 2005, China and ASEAN upgraded their relationship to a “strategic partnership for peace and prosperity.” In 2008, China sent its first ambassador to ASEAN. In 2011, the China-ASEAN Maritime Cooperation Fund was created, and the ASEAN-China Centre (ACC) was established in Beijing. In 2012, China established its Permanent Mission to ASEAN. In 2013, President Xi Jinping visited Indonesia and Malaysia and spoke about “a closer ASEAN-China Community with a Shared Future” and the Maritime Silk Road of the 21st century. Every year of the decade was marked by some important collaborative event. In 2015, China hosted the Asia-Pacific Heads of Maritime Administration Conference and initiated courses in mass rescue operations. In 2016, China and ASEAN countries made a pledge to work together to improve law enforcement cooperation. This led to the establishment of the Yunnan Police College, which is designed to provide training for foreign police officers.

In addition, a joint law enforcement and security cooperation center were also founded in Kunming that same year. Earlier in 2014, at the China-ASEAN Summit, China created the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation (LMC) to further institutionalize cooperation on water issues. At the multilateral level, China-ASEAN Ministerial Dialogue on Law Enforcement and Security Cooperation on 'Security for Prosperity' took place in 2015. A senior official hotline was also created to deal with emergencies, but it is barely functional. And, in 2016, a joint declaration was issued on maritime accidental encounters rules in the South China Sea. China has been working to establish an alternate architecture of rules and institutions in Southeast Asia by using Track-II diplomacy (Chatterji, 2021).

Sure, China is trying to create new relationships with other countries in Southeast Asia. China is very successful in its economy, but some people in Southeast Asia don't like China because they think China is doing things that are not always good for those countries. There is also some mistrust of China because some people think China is trying to take all the resources in the area. China has made some territorial claims that some countries in Southeast Asia don't like, and some people in Southeast Asia are worried that China is taking too much of their money. China is also a big part of the problem with debt in Southeast Asia since a lot of people in Southeast Asia owe money to China. But, people in Southeast Asia also hope that China will continue to be a powerful player in the region.

The United States plans to continue to play an important role in the region, but it isn't clear what Trump's policy will be toward China. However, it is hoped that Biden will try to balance cooperative and competitive strategies with China and exert pressure on China to adopt a more accommodating regional policy. Additionally, the United States should show that it values ASEAN and cares about its trust by filling in the US ambassador to ASEAN in Jakarta or attending East Asia Summits (ASEAN-Thailand Secretariat, 2019). The ASEAN member-states agreed on a statement in June 2019 about how they want to act in the Indo-Pacific region. The statement emphasizes that ASEAN is not going to give up its role in the area, even if relations between the countries involved get tense. ASEAN wants to be a mediator between countries with competing interests and work for peace, stability, and prosperity in the region.

There are competing geopolitical and geo-economic pressures on ASEAN members, and it's hard to get everyone in the same place on important issues. The ASEAN Way, which is a set of norms designed to encourage cooperation and minimize conflict, doesn't have much power in the region because it's not very popular. The ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), which is supposed to be a powerful forum for managing security issues in the Asia-Pacific region, is also struggling because of its limitations. Some people think that the times are good for Southeast Asia because it has been mostly peaceful since the end of the Vietnam War. And even though some conflicts have happened, they have been limited and not threatening to the whole region. This is something that people admire about the way ASEAN handles its diplomacy - it is known for resolving the "Cambodian Crisis" in a peaceful way. The main problem with the ASEAN Way is that it is not very effective. It was helpful when the group was founded, but it may not be necessary anymore because countries in the ASEAN region are now much more diverse and conflict-prone. The ASEAN Way's principles of non-interference

in internal affairs, the peaceful resolution of conflicts, and a prohibition on the use of force may be good ideas, but they have not always worked out in practice. The emphasis on consensus, not losing face, and voluntarism has often led to politics being done at the lowest common denominator, which has been difficult and sometimes impossible to deal with.

ASEAN's ability to influence the behavior of its members has been a problem for a while. The Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC), which provides a code of conduct and guide to behaviour for member states, depended on individual states taking its precepts and norms seriously. However, the TAC never actually got to be implemented because the "ASEAN High Council" (a multilateral body that was supposed to resolve intramural disputes) never actually got together. The key point here is that if the institutional mechanisms themselves are effective and members share a genuine commitment to their underlying principles, then cooperation can be meaningful. The main thing to know about China's rise is that it's part of a long-standing trend of China being a powerful player in East and Southeast Asia. China has always had a big role in this area, and it's not something that's new. In fact, China has been a dominant player in this region for many centuries. The tribute system, which was one way that China showed its power, was very important in keeping the region stable.

Whereas, The United States and ASEAN ties, are working together to address global challenges. We support orders based on international law in the South China Sea and in close cooperation with our allies and partners, we promote a free and open Indo-Pacific where freedom of navigation and flight is enjoyed and enjoyed. Respected by all states in accordance with international law. The United States has been a partner with ASEAN countries for over 45 years. Strong commercial and trade ties with ASEAN, and ASEAN is the world's fourth-largest market. ASEAN countries represent a major source of foreign direct investment for the United States, and U.S. travelers spend billions of dollars in ASEAN countries every year. This will help them to collaborate more closely on issues such as climate change, energy, transportation, women's empowerment, and health. In 2010, the United States created a diplomatic mission in Indonesia and appointed a resident Ambassador. This was the first time a non-ASEAN country had done this. The Obama Administration also launched the Lower Mekong Initiative, which is a partnership between the United States and the countries of the Mekong sub-region. This initiative helps to support sustainable and responsible development in these countries.

During 2010, the Secretary of Defense attended every ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMMP), an important forum for advancing security cooperation. In 2011, the United States became the first country to establish a dedicated Military Advisor/Liaison Officer at the U.S. Mission to ASEAN in Jakarta. In 2014, the Secretary of Defense hosted his ASEAN counterparts in the United States for the first time for the U.S.-ASEAN Defense Forum. The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) is a group of countries that includes Brunei, Malaysia, Singapore, and Vietnam. We have agreements with nine of the ten ASEAN countries, and we work with ASEAN as an organization to deepen our economic ties (U.S. EMBASSY IN INDONESIA, 2010). The United States collaborated with ASEAN countries to create the ASEAN Single Window, which helps speed up customs processing and creates a more efficient

regional trade environment. In 2015, the United States announced a new Technical Advisor to ASEAN to support increased information-sharing on trans-regional threats. ASEAN members are important partners in global security efforts, including the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL (Malaysia, Singapore) and counter-piracy off the Horn of Africa (Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand)

However, since 2016, events have been going badly for the United States. First, President Donald Trump withdrew the United States from the Trans-Pacific Partnership, which was a trade agreement between many countries. This destroyed the way the United States had been approaching its relationships with other countries, and there has been no policy to match the rhetoric Trump has used about the Indo-Pacific. Second, as the United States' relationship with ASEAN deteriorated, it became more difficult to show how important ASEAN is to the United States. The US President skipped two ASEAN–US meetings in 2018 and 2019, but Vice President Mike Pence attended both. ASEAN leaders didn't want to meet Pence because they felt that if the meeting was between equals, it would make them look weaker. The US Ambassador to ASEAN, who has been vacant since 2017, hasn't been replaced (Davies, 2020).

The U.S. government should continue to work with ASEAN to keep the relationship on track by focusing on three key activities. First, the U.S. should publicly commit to attending future ASEAN summits. Second, special summits hosted by the U.S. should happen more often, to show that Washington trusts and respects ASEAN. Finally, welcoming ASEAN leaders to the U.S. would help to reinforce this message. First, we need to be aware of the security situation in the Indo-Pacific region, which includes ASEAN countries. Second, we should work with ASEAN to secure this region, because it is a multilateral forum that is more effective than other alternatives. Third, we need to make sure that ASEAN is supported in this effort because sidelining ASEAN would have negative consequences.

Although, The United States and ASEAN discussed ways to deepen their strategic partnership at a meeting held on 5 August 2020. Officials from both countries noted the growing cooperation between the two sides and were pleased to see that all action lines in the 2016-2020 Plan of Action have been addressed (Secretariat, 2020). The meeting focused on the importance of collaborative efforts undertaken by both nations in addressing the COVID-19 pandemic, through a series of high-level engagements, including at the Ministers-level. They also agreed to deepen the collaboration in areas such as smart cities, infrastructure, women and youth, and the digital economy.

President Obama was a leader in developing relationships with Southeast Asian countries. President Biden will continue this work, but it is likely that he will restore some of the tension that was created in these relationships during the Obama administration. For example, the Biden administration plans to improve ties with democracies and other countries that are considered to be in the " Indo-Pacific" region, but this may reintroduce tension with some of the countries in Southeast Asia that don't fit this description. Actually, ASEAN is a regional alliance made up of countries with different values and beliefs. It can be difficult to

work with ASEAN because its members have different opinions and are often unable to follow through on their promises.

ASEAN is a group of countries that work together to promote their own values and make decisions for themselves. This is important because it means that they don't have to do everything the way other countries tell them to. The new US government under President Biden has been visiting these countries and giving them more support. This makes the people in these countries happy because they feel like the US is being nicer to them than before. The US is also giving more help to these countries to help them grow and develop. Before, the previous president didn't pay much attention to these countries and focused on other important issues. But now, people are hopeful that the new US government will have better relationships with Southeast Asia.

Since the election of President Trump, the United States has been viewed very unfavorably in Southeast Asia. The 2020 State of Southeast Asia Survey Report found that people in the region have little confidence in the United States, and they see it as being unstable and focused on its own interests. China is now seen as the most influential country in the region, and although many people in Southeast Asia are concerned about China's power, if they were forced to choose, almost half of ASEAN members would choose China over the United States (Centre, 2020). All former ASEAN members formally regard ASEAN as a cornerstone of their foreign policy, including Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore, and the Philippines. The new member states do not appear to formally view ASEAN as a cornerstone of their foreign policy. So far, ASEAN has not been mentioned as the cornerstone of Cambodia's foreign policy in official documents of the Royal Government of Cambodia. In any case, ASEAN is actually the "cornerstone" of Cambodia's foreign policy because of its active participation and the Economic and political interests of regional groups.

However, one of the strong arguments for ASEAN's importance in Cambodia's foreign policy can be reflected in the views expressed by Chheang Vannarith, founder and president of the Cambodian think tank Asian Vision Institute (AVI) he has several times. The term "cornerstone" is used repeatedly to describe ASEAN's importance in Cambodia's foreign policy as a small country in Southeast Asia and the wider Indo-Pacific region. He insisted, for example, that “[ASEAN] has been considered a cornerstone, if not a cornerstone, of Cambodia's foreign policy” (Vannarith, 2018). China has been the top donor and investor in Cambodia for a while now. China's economic presence and political leverage have increased since the signing of a comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership in 2010. In addition to a bilateral mechanism, the Belt and Road Initiative, the ASEAN-China Strategic Partnership, and the Mekong-Lancang Cooperation are some of the important regional and sub-regional cooperation mechanisms that Cambodia can benefit from the rise of China. Although Cambodia-China relations are deep, Cambodia is open to building friendships and partnerships with all countries, depending on mutual trust and interest.

Moreover, Cambodia has long been a supporter of free trade and economic integration between countries in the region. This policy is especially important because ASEAN (the

Association of Southeast Asian Nations) is seen as a key part of Cambodia's foreign policy. ASEAN provides support and helps member countries to work together better. India's "Act East" policy is aimed at strengthening ties with Southeast Asian countries, including Cambodia, in order to promote India's economic and political presence and leadership role in the region. Both India and Cambodia hope to work together more closely in both geopolitical and economic areas. Cambodia and Japan have been strengthening their relationship recently, partly because Cambodia supports Japan's "Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy" which aims to make connections between Asia and Africa more open and prosperous. However, relations between Cambodia and the United States have been difficult because of different views on democracy and human rights. There doesn't seem to be any good way to repair the damage caused by these differences.

The US is still one of the most powerful countries in the Asia-Pacific, but its power is declining. The National Security Strategy released last time set a new direction for the US's engagement in the Asia Pacific by redoubling its commitment to its existing alliances and partnerships. In addition, this power rivalry between China and the US is expected to heat up from this year, and it could create some security dilemmas and strategic challenges for Southeast Asian countries. If the small states can't balance their relationships with other countries, they might be forced to fall into the trap or become a pawn of a major power.

In fact, neutrality is hard to achieve because different countries have different interests. Cambodia is a victim of geopolitics, which is the way countries interact with each other. Geopolitics is the way different countries try to control other countries in the world. Cambodia's history, culture, and location all play a role in what its foreign policy will be. However, Cambodia's foreign policy is also determined by powerful global forces. These forces include things like security concerns, global trends, and food, energy, and climate security. Cambodia is struggling to stay independent and stable because it depends on its relationship with other countries. If things stay the same, foreign powers will keep trying to interfere in Cambodian affairs. Cambodia needs to strengthen its national unity and develop its diplomatic skills in order to keep from being influenced by other countries.

The ASEAN is a group of countries that helps each other out a lot. The ASEAN is important to Cambodia because it is one of the things that helps Cambodia stay strong and independent. The Prime Minister of Cambodia said that the ASEAN is one of the cornerstones of Cambodia's foreign policy and that Cambodia will try to uphold the "ASEAN Spirit" and "Rules-Based ASEAN" while also taking into account the interests of its different partners (Chheang, 2019). However, it's possible that the Prime Minister's statements may not always reflect Cambodia's actions. Cambodia is slowly moving towards China, instead of relying on the ASEAN. The international order is made up of different groups of countries that interact with each other in different ways. Some countries are more powerful than others, but small states have a big role to play in shaping the regional order. They can work with big countries to strengthen multilateralism and create a more fair and cooperative international system.

The regional order in the Indo-Pacific is made up of a network of relationships, institutions, and forums that help nations cooperate and protect their shared interests. This order is based on rules and norms that have been shared by many countries, and it is shaped mainly from within the region itself. Norms that are adopted by one country often spread to others, and regional agencies play an important role in helping to create and promote these ideas. The regional order in the Indo-Pacific is changing, and this is especially true for the way power is distributed. The US is withdrawing from multilateral agreements, such as the TPP, which is giving China an opportunity to expand its influence in the region faster than expected. One example of this is the Belt and Road Initiative, which is a way for China to expand its economic presence in the region. ASEAN is doing its best to find its place in this new world order, by strengthening its centrality in shaping regional architecture. Cambodia is a slice of bread sandwiched between two bigger pieces of bread. Cambodia's west is Thailand, which has more people than Cambodia. The two countries have a border dispute that is still unresolved. To the east is Vietnam, which is much more populous than Cambodia. So Cambodia has found a protector.

Since 2006, the leader of Cambodia, Hun Sen, said that China is their best friend. Since then, three presidents of China have visited Cambodia and given those lots of help and money. The current president, Xi Jinping, even called Hun Sen a very good friend. China gives more money to Cambodia than any other country, and in 2015, they gave more money than all the other countries combined (The Economist, 2017). Cambodia is really happy to keep getting lots of help from China, even though other countries in Southeast Asia are starting to be more cautious about China. The good things that come from this special relationship with China go beyond just Cambodia. Cambodia is a poor country and needs help from other countries to keep going, which is why the help from China is so important. A person who speaks for the government, Phay Siphon, says that Cambodia wouldn't be able to move forward without the help from China.

The main reason Cambodia is close to China is that it helps to balance Vietnam. Cambodians don't like the Vietnamese very much because they remember how the Vietnamese occupied their country and some people still want the delta of the Mekong River back which is now part of Vietnam. But being close to China makes people less likely to think that Hun Sen is really a Vietnamese puppet because it's easier to see him as a leader who is trying to do what's best for his country. For example, Cambodia uses China as a way to avoid getting too dependent on the West. China is a lot more reliable than most Western donations since the money doesn't come with any strings attached. This is important because when Mr. Hun Sen went against his coalition partners in the 1990s, many Western donors stopped giving money. However, China stepped in and helped to boost the amount of money that was being sent to Cambodia. This is why Mr. Hun Sen can easily shrug off protests from the West because he doesn't have to worry about losing all of his money.

In short, Cambodia has close relationships with China because it thinks it can get along better with its other neighbors, Thailand and Vietnam than it would if it had stronger ties with just one of them. Cambodia has been threatened in the past by Thailand and Vietnam because

they were much more powerful than it was, but since the fall of the Angkor Empire in the fifteenth century, they haven't been as much of a threat. This is because the countries in Southeast Asia have been divided into several different blocs, including the ASEAN. At this point, Cambodia's foreign policy must strike a balance between competing with China and maintaining its role as an important member of the ASEAN community. China has penetrated deeply into Southeast Asia politically and economically, and no Southeast Asian country can directly reject China's influence. The rise of China is a reality, and the countries of Southeast Asia must accept it in order to obtain economic opportunities. As an emerging power adjacent to Southeast Asia, China wants its global status to be respected, but it must not monopolize the region.

Cambodia needs skillful and smooth diplomacy to achieve national interests without harming any country in the geopolitical game and to avoid hostile remarks in foreign exchanges. For this to work, Cambodia needs well-trained and competent diplomats and think tanks to advise and support the country's policies, national unity, and the consolidation of democracy, human rights, and peace, rule of law, which are essential for sustainable development peace, and stability. The ASEAN allows Cambodia to be valuable to China, but it also gives Cambodia some space to make its own decisions. Cambodia needs to learn to play the geopolitical game better so it can keep its independence and strategic autonomy. It also needs to be diplomatic and careful not to hurt other countries' interests. Cambodia is a small regional player, so it needs to avoid doing things that will make bigger countries angry. And, to be a responsible member of the ASEAN, Cambodia needs to balance its national interests with those of China and the ASEAN and show solidarity with the ASEAN and its central role in the regional architecture especially to balance between great powers such as U.S. and China too.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusion, Discussion, and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion and Discussion

Cambodia's foreign policy outlook is shaped by the consequences of ongoing power shifts and great power competition in the Asia-Pacific region. As the world has become multipolar, Cambodia has adjusted its foreign policy goals and strategies accordingly. In this new world order, Cambodia's ruling elite believes that the country's foreign policy direction cannot be separated from the Asian powers. Clearly, China is re-emerging as a prominent foreign player in Cambodia. Because Cambodia's geographical, natural, and cultural landscapes are conducive to China's rise in the region, the latter country has utilized its soft power (diplomatic, economic, and cultural) to increase its involvement in the former country. China's influence now runs deep in Cambodian society. Politically, Cambodia is one of China's oldest and closest allies. Economically, China is Cambodia's top foreign investor, a major donor, and an increasingly important trading partner. Culturally, Chinese values are deeply embedded in Cambodians' way of life.

According to Ouch, Saing, and Phann, argued the dominance of China in Cambodia, becomes relevant and important to assess the role of China in the socio-economic development of Cambodia. As far as China is concerned, two points of view are opposed: one thinks that Chinese investments will contribute to the economic development of Cambodia and the reduction of poverty. For example, investment in clothing increases exports and creates local jobs, and investment in hydropower can potentially provide electricity to some if not all, of the 78 percent of the population who currently do not have access to reliable electricity. Energy efficiency is important to keep Cambodia's power demand growth under control. Over the past few years, the demand for electricity has been growing at a rate of around 20% (Ouch, Saing, & Phann, 2011). This means that a lot of money has been invested in electricity generation, which could be put to better use if energy efficiency could be improved. That would mean saving money, protecting the environment, and improving Cambodia's overall energy security. These investments may not empower all Cambodians equally at once but will contribute to everybody's well-being through trickle-down effects in the long run. The government is also expected to benefit financially through taxes and royalties from Chinese investment in mining, oil, and gas. Chinese aid for building roads, bridges, and highways is also expected to improve Cambodia's physical infrastructure, contributing indirectly to poverty reduction (UNDP, 2020).

In the end, Cambodia's foreign policy direction should be based on two fundamental principles: "pragmatism and neutrality" in terms of how it develops its ties with all actors, regardless of which of these three frameworks the country is faced with. Avoiding putting all of one's eggs in one basket, or leaning to one side or the other, is crucial for a small state like Cambodia with a relatively small agency. It is in the national interest of the kingdom to take a mixed approach incorporating "balancing and hedging" but avoids bandwagoning, depending

on the context of specific issues and conflicts, regardless of the challenges that may occur in the future development of future foreign policy.

However, defenders of the Hun Sen regime use the principles of non-interference, national sovereignty, and peace and prosperity as a justification for its foreign policy decision pertaining to China. This paper has argued that it is neither of those things but the Hun Sen regime's survival. China has provided the political and economic support needed for Hun Sen and his political party to thwart domestic challenges (Chan, 2018). Pou Sothirak argued China and the U.S. have been important players in Cambodia's development over the past few years. Other countries, such as Japan, have also played a role. Cambodia needs to find a way to balance its relationships with these different countries in order to get the most out of its relationships. In particular, it needs to avoid appearing to be biased in favor of either China or the U.S. (Sothirak, 2019)

Cambodia's place in ASEAN and support for the stronger institutionalization of ASEAN will be essential across any of the three scenarios mentioned above. The maintenance of 'foreign policy neutrality' requires Cambodia to commit willingly to ensuring that the country's approach toward multilateralism is working well to safeguard not only the kingdom's national interest but also ASEAN's region-wide interest. Cambodia must reinvigorate itself and develop its existing institutions to manage emerging challenges and ensure that the country's foreign policy options are in full support of the ASEAN Way towards a form of regionalism and multilateral cooperation that are able to function properly in order to tackle regional issues adequately. However, despite such a close relationship, a Sino-Cambodian alliance is unlikely because of the Cambodian national interest. Cambodian history is a struggle to stay out of bigger powers' influence. Entering an alliance with China is to contradict the national history that will risk provoking domestic opposition. In addition, entering an alliance restrains the foreign policy options available to the political leadership, a concession of national sovereignty and of the political power of Prime Minister Hun Sen. Therefore, it is unlikely for Cambodia to become a formal ally with China, as long as the Cambodian public reminds Hun Sen of its historical struggle.

The pursuit of a pragmatic and neutral Cambodian foreign policy is only enhanced by the kingdom's partnership with its fellow ASEAN states. If there is one "absolute" for the kingdom over the next two decades, it will be the importance of embedding itself more deeply and integrating more fully with its neighbors - an approach that some might consider idealist, but also one that provides the greatest protections for Cambodia, the safeguarding of its sovereignty, and the achievement of its national interests. ASEAN has been helpful to Cambodia in a number of ways. For example, ASEAN has helped to promote Cambodia's internal political stability, and it has been a strong supporter of Cambodia's membership in ASEAN. Additionally, ASEAN has been helpful in supplying Cambodia with diplomatic and legitimacy support.

At the same time, Hun Sen opposes the idea of a unipolar world led by the United States or a bipolar world order forged by Beijing and Washington. He hopes to revive the spirit of the

Non-Aligned Movement, strengthen South-South Cooperation (SSC), establish a friendly alliance against foreign interference, and safeguard the legitimate interests of developing countries. As a small, open economy, Cambodia needs to connect with the region and the world for its own survival and economic development. ASEAN is Cambodia's springboard to connect to the global economy. ASEAN protects its members from foreign interference, especially from superpowers, by emphasizing the principle of non-intervention and consensus decision-making standards.

However, “No one can stop China, not even [the United States], China will continue to develop and we have to accept it and adjust accordingly,” Pou Sothirak, a former ambassador and Cambodian government minister, said at a recent seminar at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok. Sothirak is the executive director of the Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace (CICP) and a contributor to Cambodia 2040. Forty percent of Cambodia's imports come from China, which is also the country's biggest source of investment, and its glass-and-concrete fruit dominates boomtowns like Phnom Penh and Sihanoukville. However, *Sithy Rath Daravuth and Vrak Thanit*, “Cambodia need to prevent the negative effects of the US-China trade war as well as the elimination of EBA”. The EU decision to reassess Cambodia's market privileges also stems from the 2018 national elections, in which the ruling CPP won all 125 seats after Sokha's Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP) and Ramsy's was banned after the local shutdown of Hun Sen's CPP in the 2017 municipal elections (Roughneen, 2019). On the other hand, The European Chamber of Commerce in Cambodia warned in November that 90,000 jobs might be lost if EBA trade privileges are reduced. Meanwhile, Europe and North America are the primary markets for Cambodia's exports of clothing, which are produced by hundreds of thousands of factory employees (Blomberg, 2019).

To understand why Hun Sen chose China instead of ASEAN, the author says we need to look at both the way countries interact with each other and how leaders make decisions. The author believes it's important to consider how political leaders think and feel when making decisions about other countries. They use different methods to study this, like looking at a leader's beliefs, how they see themselves, and their emotions. By using these methods, the author says they can understand why Hun Sen made the choices he did. They believe that Hun Sen's decision to choose China over ASEAN was not a bad decision, because China supports Cambodia in many ways and helps the people in power stay in control. If Cambodia's safety depends on its relationship with China, then it makes sense for Cambodia to work with China instead of trying to work together with other countries in ASEAN.

In the future, Cambodia may need to rely more on its nearby friends and organizations to help it, instead of depending too much on China. This is because there is a problem between China and the United States, and Cambodia is caught in the middle. It's worrying because this problem could cause conflicts in other countries, which could make things unstable in our region. The leaders in our area are worried about this problem and they might have to choose sides. China and the United States would use other countries to fight for them, which could cause fights between those countries. If the rules and systems that keep things fair stopped working, our region's safety would be in danger. The trade problem between China and the

United States is getting worse and might keep going for a long time. The presidents of both countries have different ways of dealing with the problem, which is causing problems for them and the rest of the world. Cambodia, as a smaller country, is likely to be affected by this problem.

5.2 Recommendations

5.2.1 Recommendations from This Research

This Independence Studies (IS) has three policy implications for international relations scholars and practitioners seeking to analyze Cambodia's foreign policy among contending great powers, namely the United States and China, and for those studying geopolitical issues and security in Asia. Pacific region.

Firstly, endowed with a tragic history, limited resources, weak institutions, and vulnerable geography that is wedged between hostile neighbors and in a region shared by more than one potential hegemon, Cambodia today is a hedger by default. After its predecessor, the Khmer Empire, collapsed in the 15th century, Cambodia played the balancing game between Thailand and Vietnam by pitting each against the other in order to safeguard its existence. Soon after it became independent in 1953, Cambodia, under Norodom Sihanouk, opted for neutrality in response to real and perceived threats from North Vietnam, on the one hand, and Thailand and South Vietnam, on the other. It sought assistance and guarantee from both the socialist and the capitalist camps so that it could remain a neutral state in a geopolitically hyperpolarized world divided between two ideological lines. Cambodia under Hun Sen hedges between the United States and China because it faces similar internal and external challenges that occurred in the past, such as a weak central government, poorly armed forces, threats from neighboring countries, the need for external legitimacy, and growing geopolitical polarization around its peripheries. Even though Phnom Penh tends to be closer to Beijing than Washington in normal circumstances, both these countries continue to be the two most preeminent external players, which have diplomatic, economic, military, and strategic impacts on the RGC's foreign policy.

The United States should expect to see Cambodia take a hard line against Washington in the upcoming elections, as this is a temporary decision rather than a permanent one. Cambodia distanced itself from the United States. Politically and leaned closer to China during the elections in 2003, 2008, 2013, and 2018 in order to secure a favorable electoral result for the ruling CPP. Once the party won, Cambodia eased the tension and improved its relations with the U.S. in order to counterbalance its dependence on China and appease domestic constituencies: the winning coalition and the opposition group. It is not clear how long it will take for Cambodia to begin its rapprochement with the United States again, but this study explains why the country might do this.

The secondly, policy implication of this study is that Cambodia will continue to implement hedging in the future because this strategy serves both domestic and foreign policy purposes. Hedging enables the CPP to show the Cambodian electorates that they are doing

everything they can to safeguard the kingdom's independence and steer the country away from becoming a pawn on a geopolitical chessboard. Moreover, the CPP has been able to extract economic, political, and military benefits from its relations with the US and China, and use them to bring about social stability, economic growth, and national security for voters. More specifically, ties with the US boost the CPP's legitimacy and enable them to perpetuate the illusion of liberal democracy with the presence of regular elections, a sizeable community of NGO and civil society groups, local and international press, and piecemeal governmental reforms. The CPP's message for the Cambodian voters is that, as long as they are in power, Cambodia will not deviate from hedging to align with a foreign power. As enshrined in the 1993 constitution, Cambodia's foreign policy will continue to be "permanently neutral and non-aligned." This means that people can rest assured and enjoy peace, stability, and prosperity.

Hun Sen is the leader of Cambodia and he uses a strategy called "hedging" to balance his power and control the country. He also tricks the Western countries into thinking he is a legitimate leader. Another leader named Sam Rainsy is a threat to Hun Sen's power, but he is not currently involved in politics which makes it harder for Hun Sen to pretend that Cambodia has many different political parties. If Rainsy speaks out against Hun Sen and his party, he could get into trouble and face serious consequences. But it also makes people who want democracy support Rainsy and makes other countries pay attention to him. For the past twenty years, Hun Sen and Rainsy have been playing a game of "catch-and-release" to make sure people at home and in other countries still see them as important. The United States and its friends also play this game to keep their influence and balance China's power. Hedging also helps Cambodia have good relationships with neighboring countries in Southeast Asia, as well as countries like Japan, South Korea, and the European Union who they work with on politics and money. Finally, Cambodia can help the United States and China get along peacefully and help ASEAN get more involved in important things happening in the region.

For people in charge of making decisions for the United States, it's important to understand that the way Cambodia's leaders make decisions within their own country also affects how they interact with other countries. Cambodia's leaders are careful and don't want to take big risks that could cause problems for their own government. This means that the United States won't support big changes in Cambodia's government because it could make things unstable for the people in charge. However, this situation gives the United States a chance to work with Cambodia on things that are important, like making sure people have rights and can vote for their leaders. Sometimes, putting pressure on Cambodia to do better on these things can make them start to make small changes. But if the United States is too strict about human rights, it can make the Cambodian leaders angry and less likely to work with the United States on other important things. The United States needs to be careful to keep its reputation good in that part of the world. It should keep talking about democracy in Cambodia, but maybe not in public. That way, it can try to build trust with some of the Cambodian leaders who want to see their country become more democratic and have good relationships with the United States. These leaders will become more important in the future and will help shape Cambodia's relationships with other countries.

Thirdly, policy implication has to do with the future of Southeast Asia and the Asia-Pacific region. Cambodia is not the only small state in the region, other ASEAN states, such as Vietnam, Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia, are also “hedging” but with different characteristics. This is because upholding the regional balance of power, in which no one country can dominate the region alone, is the ultimate goal of states in the ASEAN bloc. This common pattern of hedging of small Southeast Asian countries is an opportunity for the United States to strengthen its economic, political, and military presence in the region and to promote a rules-based order that discourages a rising China from opting for a revisionist posture, which may destabilize the region.

The United States should continue to work with ASEAN countries bilaterally and multilaterally. Bilaterally, the United States should continue to provide aid, allow students from the US to study in ASEAN countries, increase ties between the US and ASEAN scholar community, support the activities of the Lower Mekong Initiative, and increase engagement with each ASEAN government on issues of shared international interests. Multilaterally, the United States should pay more attention to ASEAN, show its support for the organization, and signal its commitment to it in order to reassure states in the region of Washington's commitment and interest in Southeast Asia. As long as China's economic and military power continues to grow, ASEAN members look to the United States as the most vital strategic actor, which has adequate resources to counterbalance China.

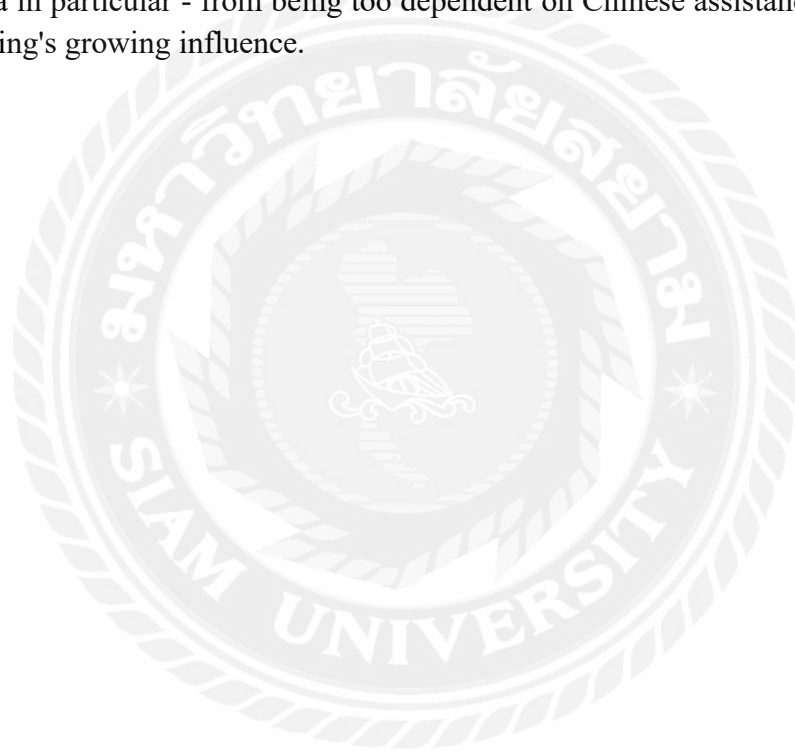
5.2.2 Recommendations for Future Research

This pattern of behavior is a future reference for U.S. policymakers when they want to understand the logic of Cambodia's foreign policy. A policy recommendation for the United States is that it should not talk about democracy and human rights during the Cambodian general election season, because it will make the relationship between the two governments more tense. The CPP will continue to be the most powerful political party in Cambodia for a while, and the leader who comes after Hun Sen is likely to be someone from the CPP. So, the United States should express its criticisms and concerns privately, rather than publicly. This way, it may reduce diplomatic friction and promote a proactive response from the CPP elites. Private diplomacy may pave the way for a candid engagement and cement mutual trust between Washington and Phnom Penh.

The United States should continue to engage Cambodia even when it distances itself from Washington during election time, in order to retain its diplomatic influence and to offset the growing presence of the PRC. Public diplomacy programs, such as short- and long-term scholarship opportunities, cultural exchanges, support for home-grown entrepreneurs, and educational events aimed at engaging the youth population are one aspect the United States can do to help shape Cambodia's behaviors. It is obvious that the CPP elites, who tend to favor China, dominate Cambodia's foreign policy decision-making. However, Hun Sen does not and cannot completely ignore the demands of young voters, who are the main backbone of the economy and whose support is essential for his political survival. Cambodia's national interest

is to develop economically and reduce poverty, so its foreign policy should aim to serve this purpose.

Securing development assistance from friendly countries, promoting exports, and attracting foreign direct investment are the means to achieving these goals. The US has been a significant help in meeting Cambodia's needs in the process of nation-building, and deepening trust and good relations between the two would help secure Cambodia's neutrality and independence. US development assistance and engagement should also aim to help Cambodia develop a strong sense of balance in its external relations. At the same time, Washington should respect Cambodia's efforts to improve its relationships with all friendly countries and not use its strong support for democracy and human rights to embarrass the Cambodian government. Resetting relations on a friendlier path would help create a more effective strategy for the US to counter China's perceived strengths in the region. This would also help Southeast Asia in general - and Cambodia in particular - from being too dependent on Chinese assistance and relying too heavily on Beijing's growing influence.



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