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## New Government in Cambodia

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## New Government in Cambodia

### Abstract

The government of Cambodia is replete with corruption and does not respond adequately to the needs of its citizens according to Joel Brinkley's Foreign Affairs article "Cambodia's Curse." Pol Pot, the killing fields, and the Khmer Rouge still linger in the memories of most Americans when Cambodia's name is mentioned. Yet, the country is currently languishing in the arms of an unresponsive governing elite whose fortunes may continue to improve due to oil and continuous aid grafting.

### Keywords

Human rights, Cambodia, Post-war reconstruction, Peace, Stability, Corruption, Repression

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## New Government in Cambodia

by Tyler Moselle

The government of Cambodia is replete with corruption and does not respond adequately to the needs of its citizens according to Joel Brinkley's *Foreign Affairs* article "Cambodia's Curse." Pol Pot, the killing fields, and the Khmer Rouge still linger in the memories of most Americans when Cambodia's name is mentioned. Yet, the country is currently languishing in the arms of an unresponsive governing elite whose fortunes may continue to improve due to oil and continuous aid grafting.

What in good conscience should a humanitarian do?

- 1) **Support the regime:** More wealth will trickle down, help improve swathes of the country and the foreign investment climate, and all rice paddies will eventually rise. They are a minority elite, but someone has to keep things stable.
- 2) **Call for sanctions:** Call them out on corruption and aid grafting, enforce stricter oversight, and ensure Cambodian dissent is empowered as a counter-balance to the government. Cambodia was the first major UN nation-building effort of the 1990s, so bring back the Security Council. If the sanctions and UN don't work, invade, overthrow the regime, and re-order the society.
- 3) **Take it to the streets:** Call for the removal of the regime and establish a new government in Cambodia via organic revolution.
- 4) **Do nothing:** Write and read online humanitarian blogs to at least understand what is happening in a distant part of the world.

While you ponder the menu of options, ask yourself the irreverent question: what would Pol Pot do? After all, before the Khmer Rouge took power, Cambodian radical Marxists claimed the [Sihanouk regime](#) was corrupt, comprised of minority elitists, and unresponsive to the majority of citizens who were agrarian-based. They called for a more just society going so far as to press the reset button and start over at "[Year 0](#)."

Let us be moderate conservatives, argue that human nature is essentially corrupt, and that we can't do any better than Prime Minister Hun Sen. The oil wealth will bring in foreign investments which won't necessarily buttress the regime and help it transition to wealthy, tyrannical rule. Instead it will contribute to building a middle class again—the group of educated workers and intelligentsia killed during the 1970s for wearing glasses. Give things time—don't be so impetuous!

Let us be good humanitarian internationalists and clamor for the Security Council. They can do something. Or, perhaps more subtle methods can be used to merely enforce responsible oversight from aid agencies and donor countries. But wait, isn't the regime doing everything it can to bring in more aid while paying lip service to the demands of donors? Can we send in the protégé of [Hans Blix's](#) doppelganger from the International Committee for Responsible Donations? Can

that team write a report to someone who will do something forceful? If not, will Obama please invade with coalition partners from [ASEAN](#)?

Let us be good radical progressives and demand Cambodians take it to the streets. We can support civil-society organizations and Buddhist monk networks who demonstrate. We can call on journalists and political representatives to support the cause of the Cambodian people just like we did in Burma; just like we do in Tibet.

Or, we can do 4, which is the most likely of all.

The truth is that Cambodia's Curse is a microcosm of international politics and pricks the conscience of many individuals. Unfortunately, we pragmatic humanitarians have figured out few responsible and adequate ways to deal with the reality of societies disrupted by post-colonial revolutions, Marxist utopianism, oligarchical corruption, and tyrannical families who laugh in the face of the rule of law.

Reading Brinkley's excellent historical and contemporary portrait of Cambodia makes me realize this more forcefully than ever and leaves me wanting for something more.

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