



The Khmer Rouge diligently documented its victims such as these, who were presumably executed soon after they were photographed.

The Long Secret Alliance: Uncle Sam and Pol Pot

by John Pilger

The US not only helped create conditions that brought Cambodia's Khmer Rouge to power in 1975, but actively supported the genocidal force, politically and financially. By January 1980, the US was secretly funding Pol Pot's exiled forces on the Thai border. The extent of this support — \$85 million from 1980 to 1986 — was revealed six years later in correspondence between congressional lawyer Jonathan Winer, then counsel to Sen. John Kerry (D-MA) of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and the Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation. Winer said the information had come from the Congressional Research Service (CRS). When copies of his letter were circulated, the

John Pilger, based in London, has won numerous awards for his reporting from Indochina. His 1979 TV documentary, *Year Zero: The Silent Death of Cambodia*, is credited with alerting much of the world to the horrors of the Pol Pot regime and the US bombing that preceded it.

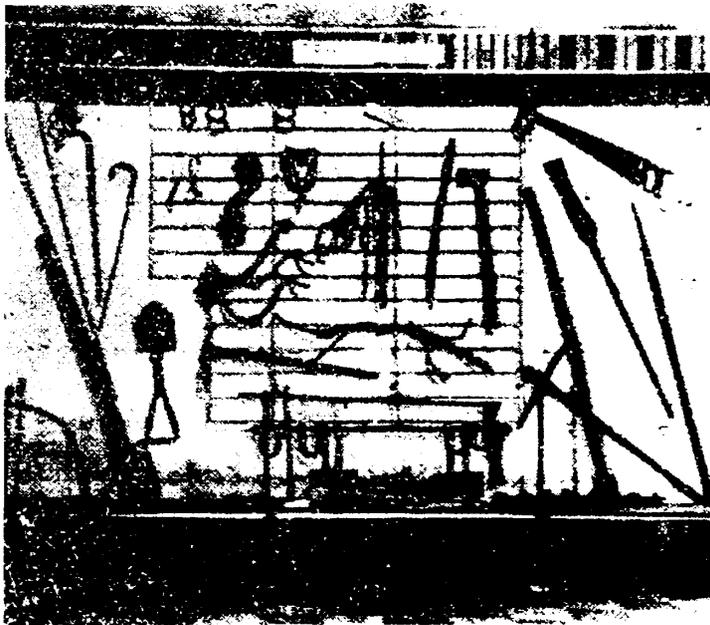
Reagan administration was furious. Then without adequately explaining why, Winer repudiated the statistics, while not disputing that they had come from the CRS. In a second letter to Noam Chomsky, however, Winer repeated the original charge, which, he confirmed to me, was "absolutely correct."¹

Washington also backed the Khmer Rouge through the United Nations, which provided Pol Pot's vehicle of return. Although the Khmer Rouge government ceased to exist in January 1979, when the Vietnamese army drove it out, its representatives continued to occupy Cambodia's UN seat. Their right to do so was defended and promoted by Washington as an extension of the Cold War, as a mechanism for US revenge on Vietnam, and as part of its new alliance with China (Pol Pot's principal underwriter and Vietnam's ancient foe). In 1981, President Carter's national security adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski, said, "I encouraged the Chinese to support Pol Pot." The US, he added, winked publicly" as China sent arms to the Khmer Rouge through Thailand.²

With 50 CIA agents running Washington's Cambodia operation from Thailand, the dividing line between the international relief operation and the US war blurred.

As a cover for its secret war against Cambodia, Washington set up the Kampuchean Emergency Group (KEG) in the US embassy in Bangkok and on the Thai-Cambodian border. KEG's job was to "monitor" the distribution of Western humanitarian supplies sent to the refugee camps in Thai-

land and to ensure that Khmer Rouge bases were fed. Working through "Task Force 80" of the Thai Army, which had liaison officers with the Khmer Rouge, the Americans ensured a constant flow of UN supplies. Two US relief aid workers, Linda Mason and Roger Brown, later wrote, "The



Khmer Rouge instruments of torture found at Tuol Sleng school.

FROM TUOL SLENG MUSEUM, CAMBODIA

US Government insisted that the Khmer Rouge be fed the US preferred that the Khmer Rouge operation benefit from the credibility of an internationally known relief operation."³ In 1980, under US pressure, the World Food Program handed over food worth \$12 million to the Thai army to pass on to the Khmer Rouge. According to former Assistant Secretary of State Richard Holbrooke, "20,000 to 40,000 Pol Pot guerrillas benefited."⁴ This aid helped restore the Khmer Rouge to a fighting force, based in Thailand, from which it destabilized Cambodia for more than a decade.

Although ostensibly a State Department operation, KEG's principals were intelligence officers with long experience in Indochina. In the early 1980s it was run by Michael Eiland, whose career underscored the continuity of American intervention in Indochina. In 1969-70, he was operations

officer of a clandestine Special Forces group code-named "Daniel Boone," which was responsible for the reconnaissance of the US bombing of Cambodia.⁵ By 1980, Col Eiland was running KEG out of the US embassy in Bangkok, where it was described as a "humanitarian" organization

Responsible for interpreting satellite surveillance photos of Cambodia, Eiland became a valued source for some of Bangkok's resident Western press corps, who referred to him in their reports as a "Western analyst." Eiland's "humanitarian" duties led to his appointment as Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) chief in charge of the Southeast Asia Region, one of the most important positions in US espionage.

In November 1980, the just elected Reagan administration and the Khmer Rouge made direct contact when Dr. Ray Cline, a former deputy director of the CIA, secretly visited a Khmer Rouge operational headquarters inside Cambodia. Cline was then a foreign policy adviser on President-elect Reagan's transitional team. Within a year, according to Washington sources, 50 CIA agents were running Washington's Cambodia operation from Thailand. The dividing line between the international relief operation and the US war became more and more confused. For example, a Defense Intelligence Agency colonel was appointed "security liaison officer" between the United Nations Border Relief Operation (UNBRO) and the Displaced Persons Protection Unit (DPPU). In Washington, sources revealed him as a link between the US government and the Khmer Rouge.⁶

The UN as a Base

By 1981, a number of governments, including US allies, became decidedly uneasy about the charade of continued UN recognition of Pol Pot as legitimate head of the country. This discomfort was dramatically demonstrated when a colleague of mine, Nicholas Claxton, entered a bar at the UN in New York with Thauon Prasith, Pol Pot's representative. "Within minutes," said

1. Letters from Jonathan Winer to Larry Chartienes, Vietnam Veterans of America, citing Congressional Research Service, Oct. 22, 1986. Letter from Winer to Noam Chomsky, June 16, 1987. Telephone communication with author, August 1989.

2. Elizabeth Becker, *When the War Was Over* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986), p. 440.

3. Linda Mason and Roger Brown, *Rice, Rivalry and Politics: Managing Cambodian Relief* (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), pp. 135, 159.

4. William Shawcross, *The Quality of Mercy: Cambodia, Holocaust and Modern Conscience* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1984), pp. 289, 345, 395.

5. William Shawcross, *Sideshow: Nixon, Kissinger and the Destruction of Cambodia* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1979).

6. The colonel's role was "made plain" at a meeting with staff members of the Senate Intelligence Committee on Feb. 10, 1990, according to John Pedler, who was at the meeting.

Clayton, "the bar had emptied." Clearly, something had to be done. In 1982, the US and China, supported by Singapore, invented the Coalition of the Democratic Government of Kampuchea, which was, as Ben Kiernan pointed out, neither a coalition, nor democratic, nor a government, nor in Kampuchea.⁷ Rather, it was what the CIA calls "a master illusion," Cambodia's former ruler, Prince Norodom Sihanouk, was appointed its head; otherwise little changed. The Khmer Rouge dominated the two "non-communist" members, the Sihanoukists and the Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPRLF). From his office at the UN, Pol Pot's ambassador, the urbane Thaoun Prasith, continued to speak for Cambodia. A close associate of Pol Pot, he had in 1975 called on Khmer expatriates to return home, whereupon many of them "disappeared."

The United Nations was now the instrument of Cambodia's punishment. In all its history, the world body has withheld development aid from only one Third World country: Cambodia. Not only did the UN — at US and Chinese insistence — deny the government in Phnom Penh a seat, but the major international financial institutions barred Cambodia from all international agreements on trade and communications. Even the World Health Organization refused to aid the country. At home, the US denied religious groups export licenses for books and toys for orphans. A law dating from the First World War, the Trading with the Enemy Act, was applied to Cambodia and, of course, Vietnam. Not even Cuba and the Soviet Union faced such a complete ban with no humanitarian or cultural exceptions.

By 1987, KEG had been reincarnated as the Kampuchea Working Group, run by the same Col. Eiland of the Defense Intelligence Agency. The Working Group's brief was to provide battle plans, war materiel, and satellite intelligence to the so-called "non-communist" members of the "resistance forces." The non-communist fig leaf allowed Congress, spurred on by an anti-Vietnamese zealot, then-Rep, Stephen Solarz (D-NY), to approve both "overt" and

7. *Inside Asia*, Feb. and June 1985. Kiernan is now program director of Yale University's Cambodian Genocide Program.



Khmer Rouge cadre in an undated photo.

"covert" aid estimated at \$24 million to the "resistance." Until 1990, Congress accepted Solarz' specious argument that US aid did not end up with or even help Pol Pot and that the mass murderer's US-supplied allies "are not even in close proximity with them [the Khmer Rouge]."⁸

The "trial" of Pol Pot was a wonderful Khmer Rouge theater-cum-media-event, but was otherwise worthless.

Military links

While Washington paid the bills and the Thai army provided logistics support, Singapore, as middleman, was the main conduit for Western arms. Former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew was a major backer

8. *New York Times*, May 14, 1989.

of the US and Chinese position that the Khmer Rouge be part of a settlement in Cambodia. "It is journalists," he said, "who have made them into demons."⁹

Weapons from West Germany, the US, and Sweden were passed on directly by Singapore or made under license by Chartered Industries, which is owned by the Singapore government. These same weapons were captured from the Khmer Rouge. The Singapore connection allowed the Bush administration to continue its secret aid to the "resistance," even though this assistance broke a law passed by Congress in 1989 banning even indirect "lethal aid" to Pol

Pot.¹⁰ In August 1990, a former member of the US Special Forces disclosed that he had been ordered to destroy records that showed US munitions in Thailand going to the Khmer Rouge. The records, he said, implicated the National Security Council, the

9. BBC Shortwave Broadcast Summary, 1990.

10. *Cambodia: The Betrayal*, Central Television, 1990.

president's foreign policy advisory body."

In 1982, when the US, Chinese, and ASEAN governments contrived the "coalition" that enabled Pol Pot to retain Cambodia's UN seat, the US set about training and equipping the "non-communist" factions in the "resistance" army. These followers of Prince Sihanouk and his former minister, Son Sann, leader of the **KPNLF**, were mostly irregulars and bandits. This resistance was nothing without Pol Pot's 25,000 well-trained, armed, and motivated guerrillas, whose leadership was acknowledged by Prince Sihanouk's military commander, his son, Norodom Ranariddh. "The Khmer Rouge," he said, are the "major attacking forces" whose victories were "celebrated as our own."¹²

The guerrillas' tactic, like that of the

of that rum, American power would again assert itself in Indochina.

The British — who have had special military forces in Southeast Asia since World War II — also played a key role in supporting Pol Pot's armed force. After the "Irangate" arms-for-hostages scandal broke in Washington in 1986, the Cambodian training became an exclusively British operation. "If Congress had found out that Americans were mixed up in clandestine training in Indochina, let alone with Pol Pot," a Ministry of Defense source told Simon O'Dwyer-Russell of the London *Sunday Telegraph* "the balloon would have gone right up. It was one of those classic Thatcher-Reagan arrangements. It was put to her that the SAS should take over the Cambodia show, and she agreed."¹³

US has maintained a network of dictators with Hitlerian tendencies — from Suharto in Indonesia to Mobutu in Zaire and a variety of Latin American mobsters, many of them graduates of the US Army School of the Americas. But only one has been identified by the world community as a genuine "Adolf Hitler revisited," whose crimes are documented in a 1979 report of the UN Human Rights Commission as "the worst to have occurred anywhere in the world since Nazism."¹⁴ He is, of course, Pol Pot, who must surely wonder at his good fortune. Not only was he cosseted, his troops fed, supplied, and trained, his envoys afforded all diplomatic privileges, but — unlike Saddam Hussein — he was assured by his patrons that he would never be brought to justice for his crimes.

These assurances were given publicly in 1991 when the UN Human Rights Sub-commission dropped from its agenda a draft resolution on Cambodia that referred to "the atrocities reaching the level of genocide committed in particular during the period of Khmer Rouge rule."¹⁵ No more, the UN body decided, should member governments seek to "detect, arrest, extradite or bring to trial those who have been responsible for crimes against humanity in Cambodia." No more are governments called upon to "prevent the return to government positions of those who were responsible for genocidal actions during the period 1975 to 1978."¹⁶

Such guarantees of impunity for the genocidists were also part of the UN "peace plan" drafted by the permanent members of the Security Council: that is, by the United States. To avoid offending Pol Pots principal backers, the Chinese, the plan dropped all mention of "genocide," replacing it with the euphemism: "policies and practices of the recent past."¹⁷ On this, Henry Kissinger, who played a leading part in the mass bombing of Cambodia in the early 1970s, was an important influence.¹⁸

Western propaganda prior to the UN "peace process" in Cambodia concentrated

14. *The Guardian* (London), Oct. 16, 1991.

15. Cited by Penny Edwards, *The Guardian*, Nov. 4, 1989.

16. Agence France Presse report from Geneva, Aug. 30, 1990.

17. Ben Kiernan, *The Cambodian Genocide: Issues and Responses*, p. 28.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 29.

19. On June 5, 1990, *The Times* (London) reported Kissinger assaying, "I would not be surprised if 10 years from now, China, even following its present course, will appear like a freer country than Russia and a more prosperous one." In July 1989, Kissinger, who has strong business interests in China, had urged Bush to give the Beijing regime "most favored nation" trading status, despite the bloody events in Tiananmen Square only weeks earlier. He regards the Chinese leadership as a moderating influence in Southeast Asia and supports China's "present course."



LEAH MELNICK/IMPACT VISUALS

Some of Cambodia's refugees at a UN-run camp controlled by the KPNLF.

Contras in Nicaragua, was to terrorize the countryside by setting up ambushes and seeding minefields. In this way, the government in Phnom Penh would be destabilized and the Vietnamese trapped in an untenable war: its own "Vietnam." For the Americans in Bangkok and Washington, the fate of Cambodia was tied to a war they had technically lost seven years earlier. "Bleeding the Vietnamese white on the battlefields of Cambodia" was an expression popular with the US policy-making establishment. Destroying the crippled Vietnamese economy and, if necessary, overturning the government in Hanoi, was the ultimate goal. Out

11. San Francisco *Examiner*, Aug. 12 and 15, 1990.

12. In 1990 Ranariddh said that, in a proposed attack on

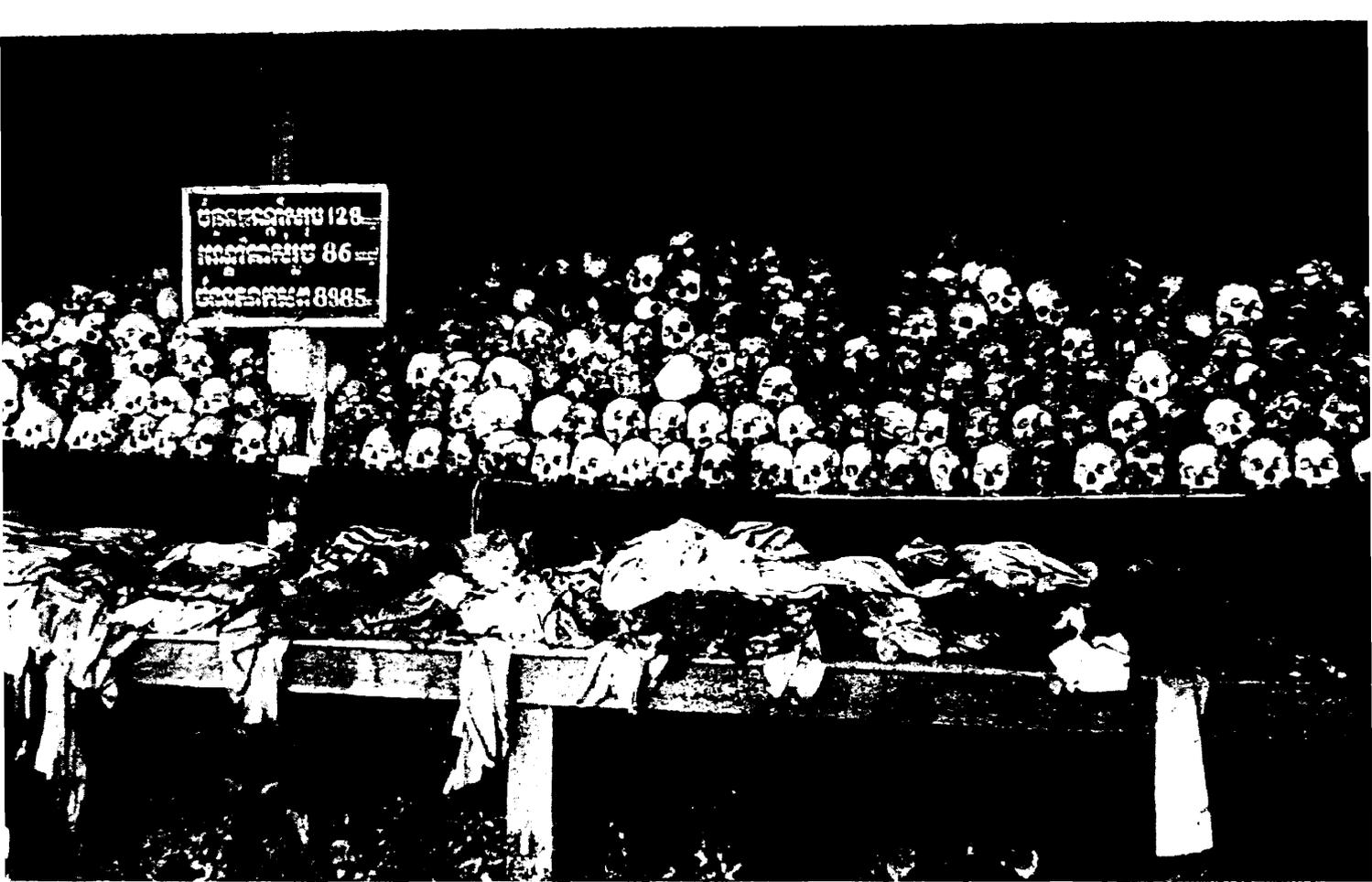
Pol Pot's Washington Impunity

Shortly after the start of the Gulf War in January 1991, President Bush described Saddam Hussein as "Adolf Hitler revisited."¹⁴ Bush's call for "another Nuremberg" to try Saddam under the Genocide Convention was echoed in Congress and across the Atlantic in London.

It was an ironic distraction. Since the original Fuhrer expired in his bunker, the

Siem Reap, The Khmer Rouge will be the major attacking forces," Associated Press, Oct. 11, 1990; *Indochina Digest*, Oct. 6, 1990. His separate Statement that Sihanoukists celebrated Khmer Rouge victories as their own was reported in the *Sunday Correspondent* (London), Nov. 5, 1989.

13. As told to O'Dwyer-Russell by a Defense Ministry source, and relayed to the author.



STEVE GRAMM/PACT VISUALS

A display near Phnom Penh shows the remains of some 20,000 genocide victims from more than 200 burial sites.

on the strength of the Khmer Rouge, so as to justify their inclusion. UN officials and American and Australian diplomats talked about 35-40,000 Khmer Rouge. "You will understand," they would say, "we can't leave a force as powerful as that outside the tent." As soon as the Khmer Rouge had been welcomed back to Phnom Penh and, in effect, given a quarter to a third of the countryside, they refused to take part in the elections. The tune then changed. They were now "finished," chorused Western diplomats. They were "weakened beyond hope."

In the meantime, the Khmer Rouge was establishing itself as the richest terrorist group in history by selling off tracts of Cambodia's forests, as well as its precious stones, to the Thai, whose government was a signatory to the "peace accords." No one stopped them. They established four large new bases inside Thailand, complete with a field hospital. Thai soldiers guarded the road that led to them. The "they are finished" line remains in vogue to this day. Undoubtedly, they have been numerically diminished by defections and attrition, but their number was always a false measure of their true strength. It seems the State Department believes they are far from finished. On July 10

this year, the spokesperson Nicholas Burns let slip that Khmer Rouge strength ran into "thousands."²⁰

The real threat from the Khmer Rouge comes from their enduring skill at deception and infiltration. Before they seized power in

truth is that no one on the outside can really say what these are, and that alone is a measure of the organization's strength and resilience. The Cambodian leader Hun Sen, for one, clearly retains a respect for the veracity and menace of their ambitions.

Pol Pot's patrons not only cosseted him, fed, supplied, and trained his troops, but also guaranteed him impunity.

1975, they had honeycombed Phnom Penh. This process is almost certainly under way again. As one resident of Phnom Penh said recently, "They're everywhere."

The "trial" of Pol Pot this year was a wonderful piece of Khmer Rouge theater-cum-media-event, but was otherwise worthless as an indication of the organization's strength and immediate aims. The

The media relish Pol Pot as a unique monster. That is too easy and too dangerous. It is his Faustian partners in Washington, Beijing, London, Bangkok, Singapore, and elsewhere who deserve proper recognition. The Khmer Rouge have been useful to all their converging aims in the region.

Eric Falt, the UN's senior spokesperson in Phnom Penh at the time of that manipulated organization's "triumph" in Cambodia, told me with a fixed smile, "The peace process was aimed at allowing [the Khmer Rouge] to gain respectability." Unfortunately, many ordinary Cambodian people share his cynicism. They deserve better. ■

20. State Department Briefing transcript, US State Department, July 10, 1997.

21. Interviewed by the author on film for Return to Year Zero, Central Television, London, broadcast March 1992.