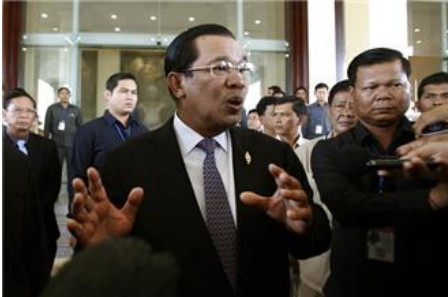


Marking the end of Pol Pot's rule in Cambodia by Kevin Doyle

Phnom Penh, Cambodia - Days ago, Prime Minister Hun Sen had a strong message for his people: you are either with me or against me [and] those who oppose his own government are modern-day supporters of the equally radical Khmer Rouge.

"January 7" marks the day in 1979 when Vietnamese forces, and members of Hun Sen's government, deposed Pol Pot. Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge regime started in 1975 and was responsible for the deaths of an estimated 1.7 million people through starvation, execution, and overwork.

Cambodian
Prime
Minister Hun
Sen [AP]



"You loathe the Pol Pot regime but you also oppose those who overthrew Pol Pot. So, what does it mean?" Hun Sen said. "It means that they are allies of the Pol Pot regime. If they oppose January 7, they are in alliance with the Khmer Rouge and the genocidal regime."

Opinions divided

January 7 is a contentious commemoration in Cambodia. Traditionally, it is celebrated by members and supporters of Hun Sen's ruling Cambodian People's Party (CPP), which first came to power on the back of the Vietnamese victory over the Khmer Rouge.

Critics see January 7 as the day Vietnam invaded to install a government sympathetic to Hanoi, and which remains in power and indebted to the Vietnamese to this day.

[January 2015] also marks Hun Sen's 30th year at the centre of power. He was first appointed prime minister in 1985 by the country's then-communist government.

"It's a very sad day for Cambodia when we continue to label the victims of the Khmer Rouge as perpetrators," Mu Sochua, a prominent member of the opposition Cambodian National Rescue Party (CNRP), said in response to Hun Sen's comments.



Meo Soknen, 13, stands inside a small shrine full of human bones and skulls, all victims of the Khmer Rouge [AP]

Referring to Hun Sen's position as a mid-level Khmer Rouge military commander before defecting to Vietnam in 1977, Sochua said it was ironic the person labelling others as Khmer Rouge sympathisers was himself a former member of the regime, and so were many members of his current government.

"We know who the Khmer Rouge were, and who came out of the Khmer Rouge," she told Al Jazeera. "The prime minister cannot hide the truth."

Vietnam's alleged transgressions were both historic and contemporary: loss of border territory, continuing influence over Cambodian politics, and unchecked migration of Vietnamese citizens to Cambodia.

Ou Ritthy, a blogger, youth activist and founder of the popular weekly public discussion forum known as *Politikoffee* says young people "don't care much" about January 7. More important issues for young people are economic development, improving governance, and ending corruption.

Invasion or liberation?

Politically, January 7 is **polarizing** with supporters and [critics] generally adopting [completely opposite] views, said Ritthy, adding young people have a more **nuanced** understanding.

"It was clearly a liberation from Pol Pot, but it was also an invasion from Vietnam," he said.

[Late last year], Roeun Kosal made a one-man protest on the streets of the Cambodian capital. Kosal carried a black umbrella on his long march to the war crime tribunal. To it he had affixed paper placards naming the culprits he blames for the mass killings, including his parents, during the Pol Pot years. None of those he named were Cambodian, however.

Pol Pot, who died in 1998, was not one of the names on the protest placards.

"The one to blame is the Hanoi government ... they killed the people," he said, recounting a conspiracy that goes as follows: the Khmer Rouge movement was infiltrated by the Vietnamese, along with treacherous Cambodians with "Vietnamese minds", who engineered genocide against the Khmer race.

Blaming Vietnam

A surprising number of Cambodians [believe] that the mass killing during the Khmer Rouge years was not carried out by Pol Pot and his followers. The Khmer Rouge's propaganda was that mass crimes were committed by the Vietnamese. Craig Etcheson, a scholar who has researched the Khmer Rouge for decades, said [the] propaganda was in response to Vietnam's intervention in Cambodia.

Craig Etcheson is a scholar who has researched the Khmer Rouge for decades. Etcheson spent six years investigating Pol Pot-era crimes at the co-prosecutors' office at the United Nations (UN) war crimes tribunal, a court assembled by UN members in order to investigate and prosecute murder during war (including civil war).

The Khmer Rouge popularised the slogan "Khmer do not kill Khmer", said Etcheson.

"Since the Cambodian people clearly knew that there had indeed been a lot of killing, this slogan begged the question of just who then did all that killing. For the Khmer Rouge, an easy answer was close to hand: it was the Vietnamese. They have stuck with that line ever since.

"The bottom line is that it is the opposite of the truth," he added.

polarizing - to divide into sharply opposing factions, political groups, etc.

nuanced - a subtle difference or distinction in expression, meaning, response, etc.

During the Khmer Rouge tribunal in 2011, Nuon Chea blamed all the crimes during his regime - even scarce meals prepared - on the Vietnamese. As Cambodians are devout Buddhists, the Khmer Rouge could not have committed the acts they are accused of, he said.

"These crimes - war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide - were not from Cambodian people," Nuon Chea told the court, according to the *Cambodia Daily*.

During the Cambodian Genocide of 1975–1979 **Nuon Chea** was known as "**Brother Number Two**", as he was second-in-command to Khmer Rouge leader Pol Pot. On 7 August 2014, Nuon Chea received a life sentence for crimes against humanity. He is the oldest of the last surviving Khmer Rouge leaders.

"It was Vietnamese who killed Cambodians. Everything was under the control of Vietnam - even the cooks were Vietnamese."

1. According to Hun Sen, anyone who does not support him is a follower of

_____.

2. Why might some Cambodians be cautious about supporting Hun Sen?

3. Why don't younger Cambodians think January 7th is important?

4. Why is the section on page 2 subtitled *Invasion or liberation*? What is the main idea that the author wants you to understand in that section?

