

# A Theory-Based Analysis on Implications of Democracy in Cambodia

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**Abstract**—Democracy has been categorically accepted and used as foreign and domestic policy agendas for the hope of peace, economic growth and prosperity for more than 25 years in Cambodia. However, the country is now in the grip of dictatorship, human rights violations, and prospective economic sanctions. This paper examines different perceptions and experiences of democratic assistance. In this study, the author employs discourse theory, idealism and realism as a theory-based methodology for debating and assessing the implications of democratization. Discourse theory is used to establish a platform for understanding discursive formations, body of knowledge and the games of truth of democracy. Idealist approaches give rational arguments for adopting key tenets that work well on the ground. In contrast, realism allows for some sweeping critiques of utopian ideal and offers particular views on why Western hegemonic missions do not work well. From idealist views, the research finds that Cambodian people still believe that democracy is a *prima facie* universality for peace, growth and prosperity. From realism, democratization is on the brink of death in three reasons. Firstly, there are tensions between Western and local discourses about democratic values and norms. Secondly, democratic tenets have been undermined by the ruling party-controlled courts, corruption, structural oppression and political patronage-based institutions. The third pitfall is partly associated with foreign aid dependency and geopolitical power struggles in the region. Finally, the study offers a precise mosaic of democratic principles that may be used to avoid a future geopolitical and economic crisis.

**Keywords**—Corruption, democracy, democratic principles, discourse theory, discursive formations, foreign aid dependency, games of truth, geopolitical and economic crisis, geopolitical power struggle, hegemonic mission, idealism, realism, utopian ideal.

## I. HISTORIC BACKGROUND AND DEMOCRACY IN CAMBODIA

FOR several centuries, Cambodia has evolved from Khmer feudalism, colonialism, post-colonialism, monarchy, modernization and post-modernization, communism to a democratically elected government. Historians describe these historic junctures starting from French colonialism (1863-1953), post-independence or post-colonialism (1953-69), wartime or civil war (1970-75) and revolutionary economy or Khmer Rouge regime (1975-89) to rehabilitation and reconstruction of post-conflict settings (1990s-2000s) [1]-[3]. With Resolution 718 of the United Nations Security Council in October 1991, 22,000 UN personnel were involved in peacemaking, peacekeeping and peace-building processes [4]. Subscribing the 1991 Paris Peace Accord, the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) organized the UN-sponsored election in 1993 to establish a democratic government. The country widely accepted democratic values,

norms and beliefs. The seed of democracy was implanted on the ground for the hope of peace and a new liberal democratic system [5].

Since 1993, idealist Western countries and other donors have conceptualized and translated the notion of democracy into not only the country's constitution, institutional and political systems but also into development programs and democratization assistance. The international community focuses on state building, institutional building, civil society, the media, and electoral programs [6]. Multi-billion US dollars from foreign donors were invested for the hope of peace, economic recovery and political stability. Cambodia received US\$880 million for reconstruction and democratic peace in 1993. The regime represented "a brave new liberal world where the notions of democracy, human rights, and free market economy took root in Cambodian soil for the first time" [7, p. 70]. As a result, the nation managed to avoid a renewed risk of violence and maintained a fragile peace with a gradual economic growth for more than three decades. However, the country has still faced conflicting and contesting ideological and political interests and values, and power struggle between insiders who their mentality is in favor of communism and those are linear to the Anglo-American and Western democratic systems. The tension is integral to resisting discourses "What kinds of democracy, Whose democracy, Whose outcomes"? Some historians and scholars have different views over Cambodia's progress and advancement after three decades. Professor Gareth Evans, the initiator of the 1991 Paris Peace Accord and the Former Australian Foreign Minister was quoted as saying, "We were tremendously successful in bringing peace to Cambodia, but we weren't at all successful in bringing democracy and human rights" quoted in the Australian Broadcasting Corporation on 30 July 2018 in the Four Corners Report [8]. Similarly, there are doubts about success stories and failures of liberal democratic project in a newly democratized government because it has been modified and transferred by a combination of local political, economic, social and cultural dynamics [9].

Drawing upon the above different perspectives of fledgling democratization, the author aimed at breaking the mold of literature review of Western liberal tenets which have been practiced in Cambodia. In this study, the author resorts to a blend of discourse theory, idealism and realism as a theory-based method for debating and assessing the implications of democratization. Discourse theory is used to establish a platform for understanding discursive formations, body of

knowledge and the games of truth of democracy. Idealist approaches give rational arguments for adopting key tenets that work well on the ground. In contrast, realism allows for some sweeping critiques of utopian ideal and offers particular views on why Western hegemonic missions do not work well.

## II. THEORETICAL RELEVANCE TO DEMOCRACY

### A. Discourse Theory and Democracy

Technologies of discourse, like other technologies, open up possibilities in various directions, some more beneficial for the majority of people than others [10, p. 239].

Science is a discourse within which participants are schooled and credentialed in ideology of accumulated human knowledge as the basis for careful human action [11, p. 137].

From the quotes, the technology of discourse is rooted in human knowledge and actions through social discursive practices and interactions. Foucault argues that discourse is produced, exercised and redistributed at different levels by individuals, institutions, states, and other social groups [12]. He not only considers discourse as groups of signs showing “meanings, representations and contents” but also “as practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak” [12, p. 49]. Thus, we create discourses and meanings of an object or subject through our language, so discourse shapes our beliefs and behaviors. Drawing the above authors’ arguments, the author examines how the discourse of “democracy” is constructed and exercised through discursive formations, the body of knowledge, and the games of truth.

*“Discursive formations are defined as much by what lies outside them as what lies within... It is an archaeological knowledge that is unearthed through historical archives of different societies to bring to light the discursive formations and events that have created the field of knowledge and games of truth by which that society has governed itself”* [13, p. 35-36].

The quote suggests that the discourse (e.g.; democracy) is socially, economically and politically rooted in the human archaeological knowledge in which its historical foundation of democracy is established. For instance, democracy originally emerged in Athens, the Greece city during the sixth century B.C.E and appeared to be popular for the last two centuries [14]. It evolved within 200 years from 1800 to 2010. The first was derived from the 1820s to the 1920s in 29 states [15]. Secondly, after the World War II, it reached its peak up to 36 countries being governed democratically, but it declined to 30 nations within 15 years between 1960 and 1975. The third wave showed a doubling number of democratic societies. At least 30 more countries in the world transformed themselves from a colonialism or communism into democratic states between the 1980s and 1990s [15]. From the 1990s, Cambodia entered into the lexicon of the third wave under the UNTAC-made democracy. The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank, Asian Development Bank (ADB), and other

donors played a key role in launching governance reform programs, market-oriented reforms, and democratic assistance programs in order to enhance and modernize traditional public administration in post-conflict Cambodia [16], [4].

Eventually, the public discourse of democracy becomes “a process in which quite different polities try to gain public ear and eye in an attempt to persuade citizens to agree with their own position and support it” [11, p.76]. Achen and Bartels argue:

*Democracy has passed into everyday wisdom, not just in the United States, but also in a great many other countries around the globe. It constitutes a kind of folk theory of democracy, a set of accessible, appealing ideas assuring people that they live under an ethically proper form of government that has their interests at heart* [17, p. 1].

From the quote, the language of democracy is redistributed and operated as the public discourse and socially and historically accepted as the universal truth. It is a representation of what we think and how we act in the “forms of language working through various institutional settings to lay down the grounds upon which we make sense of it” [13, p. 45]. Thus, it is symbolized as meanings and a technological truth; then it is considered as the production of scientific methods [18]. As far as truth is concerned, it is defined as “a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation, and operation of statements” [19, p. 133]. “The human subject fits into certain games of truth, where they were truth games that take the form of a science or refer to a scientific model...and how, in scientific discourses, the human subject defines itself as a speaking, living, working individual” in a regime of truth [20, p. 281].

The quotes indicate that games of truth are the form of science. It “helps us produce our subjectivity, discursively positioning us to see the truth about ourselves, our desires, our experiences and ourselves” [19, p. 40]. When the truth (e.g.; democracy) is constituted; it is resided in institutions and human knowledge [13]. For instance, the games of truth of democracy is institutionalized in the UN Declarations (e.g.; Guidance Note of the Secretary-General on Democracy, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs), Development Assistance Committee (DAC) Guidelines and Reference, and Sustainable Development Goals, SDG (Promoting just, peaceful and inclusive societies) [21], [22]. Aid-recipient governments, international institutions and civil society cannot resist, but agreeing on conditions to deliver predominant truths of Western democracy. Under aid conditionality, Western donors and host governments resort democracy to localizing policy agendas, development programs, and democratic assistance. For example, the Cambodian government adopted the Western based-policy packages through electoral projects, multi-political party systems, institutional reforms, civil society’s engagements, accountable and clean government, and human rights policy after 1993. After three decades, the liberal democracy has entered into the games of truth in which idealists start an open

debate.

### *B. Linking Idealism with Democracy*

German, British and American idealists primarily pursued further inquiries on different emerging themes of idealism in IR context such as liberal peace and liberal democracy from the 1920s to 1930s. From American perspective, idealism was associated with the first U.S. idealist, President Woodrow Wilson (1919-39) who adopted the establishment of the League of Nations called the United Nations to manage risks and control threats to international security [23]. Technocrats proposed the so-called liberal internationalist or utopians of the global peace. As a result, the League of Nations was founded in 1920 and the 1928 Kellogg-Briand Pact outlawed war and provided peaceful settlements based on rationality and morality [24].

The main purpose of idealism is to harmonize an international cooperation and to promote shared values, human rights, enlightenment and freedom [25]-[27]. The proposal drew more attention to the so-called "great debates" about the world order and policy agendas [28]. Western technocrats and policymakers are willing to surround and support the utopias of harmonious peace as neoliberal norms and values in two reasons. First, they view democracy as the pinnacle of peace and human prosperity, freedom and equality under neoliberal ideology and political discourses. And they believe that democracy is integral to maintaining a durable peace, political stability and economic growth. Wilson claims:

*While accepting the idealist approach, we all are bound by a universal morality. Idealists believe that the spread of the principles of neoliberal peace in foreign policy empower the world public opinion and make it a more powerful force that no government can resist [29, p.335].*

Wilson's ideas envisage us not only to have an optimistic vision for a harmonious world order, but also help us understand the utopian democratic peace in global politics. Secondly, idealists believe that democracy is a fire extinguisher of war among democratic states and that a widespread democracy boosts a higher level of peace, political stability in illiberal nations. They believe that peace and prosperity would be durable if it were born from a democratic process. Empirically, a survey conducted by Achen and Bartels looked at a significance of democracy in 34 liberal and illiberal countries. In the survey, they asked two questions: "how important is it for you to live in a democracy; how democratically is this country being governed?" The study discovered that the universal and ideal acclaim of democracy is "absolutely critical." The authors agree if democracy is broadly accepted and institutionalized, it tends to have a clean government that represents and serves citizens' values, needs, and interests [17]. Another research conducted by Acemoglu between 1960 and 2010 found that democracy had effects on economic growth and social welfare. It is interwoven with macroeconomic policies, structural reform programs and development programs under the banner of democratization assistance [30]. Nevertheless, some commentators and scholars put many questions on applications and implications in recent

years. Why democratic elections do not produce a durable peace but more violent conflicts in none/illiberal societies [31]? How can Anglo-American and Western idealist hegemony impose its democratic values on others? How does it work widely? In response, the author resorts to realism for some criticisms of utopian ideal and offers particular views on why Western hegemonic missions do not work well.

### *C. Linking Realism with Democracy*

New realists, Kenneth Waltz and Jonh Mearsheimer opened the debate on the liberal challenges and attempted to cure the defects of the classical idealism during the Cold War in the 1970s [32], [33]. Waltz's and Mearsheimer's discussion are well known as the structural realism. In 1989, Robert Keohane generalizes and infers that states are self-interests actors who attempt to pursue their goals. Realists resort to decrying a liberal democracy paradigm that does not reflect factual truth and practicality in former communist states [25]. They rethink and diagnose its effects and raise few questions: Why democracy is too illusive to be true? What happens if none/illiberal states do not embrace the Western-based democracy [31]? In respond, there are theoretical debates on why democracy does not work on the ground.

First, common knowledge and foundations, and interpretations have not widely accepted, if truth and discourse of democracy are not diffused into institutionalization and taped into people mindsets (see discourse theory above). Second, meanings and inherited knowledge are logically constructed from one culture to another [34]. Third, the tension of ideology leads to "false consciousness" of democracy [35]. Fourth, realists are pessimistic about the prospects and possibilities to eliminate conflict and war through democratic process. Realistic scholars believe that global politics are involved in the power struggle, zero-sum game, power distribution and the balance of power. They see international affairs and world politics being practiced in the way of appetite for power- a so-called *realpolitik* or power politics for self-interested and reckless states or self-help environment [26], [28], [36]-[38].

In sum, discourse theory, idealism and realism are employed to interpret the concept of democracy. They are aligned together and have common foundations. Idealism mirrors the ideal nature of human knowledge based on our experiences and actions while discourse theorists thrash out a dominant discourse of democratization and its meanings constructed and used based on human archeological knowledge, truth, and power/knowledge. At the meantime, realism explains the power struggle, zero-sum game, power distribution and the balance of power. In the following sections, the author employs these three theories, as a methodology to assess the applications and implications of democratic assistance in Cambodia.

## III. DISCUSSION ON THEORY-BASED ANALYSIS

### *A. Idealists' Views on Democratic Tenets*

Amartya Sen, the winner of the Nobel Prize for economics, classifies democratic principles into three hallmarks [39]. First, he puts an emphasis on the *central importance* of human beings

and examines citizens' basic capabilities to take part in political and social participative interactions and practices. In the case of Cambodia, the people are able to take part in diverse groups of political parties and population in elections and development processes for the last three decades. The nation also was committed to fully respecting, protecting and enhancing human rights [40]. According to the Asia Foundation's surveys between 2003 and 2014, Cambodians already embraced democratic norms and values. They enjoyed free and fair elections, freedom of speech, civil and political liberties, and peaceful assembly through diverse activities. In 2017, the commune election represented the highest turnout to cast votes, particularly younger voters who want to see a peaceful change [41], [42]. In 2003, 81 percent of 315 respondents believed that the government was going in the right direction because citizens took benefits of economic growth, better social infrastructures and development. Another survey conducted by the International Republican Institute in mid 2009 found a similar trend that 79 percent of Cambodian population felt that the government was headed in the right direction [7].

The second tenet of democracy acts as an *instrumental role*. It is a thematic policy used to promote people's engagement, hearings, and voices. Citizens get in expressing and claiming their political attentions and economic needs through democratic election and development processes [40]. The third principle is *constructive role*. It is used as a policy tool and plays a key role in serving and responding needs, values, and norms of community. Community has equal rights to fulfill their economic needs in a democratic way based on inclusive, transparent, and accountable process for citizens' interests and values [40]. Subscribing and executing the second and third tenets, international community has transformed the country from war-affected situations into a free-market economy. The state entered into a global economy, joining the ASEAN and the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2004 and obtained the Generalized Scheme of Preference (GSP) from the U.S. and EU. The GSP is a duty-free access to the U.S. and EU for exports of all products except arms and ammunition. The total trade between the EU and Cambodia is equaled € 5.86 billion in which the EU imported goods (textile, footwear and agricultural products) was worth €5 billion from Cambodia while the EU exported goods was equaled € 581 million to Cambodia in 2017 [43].

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) shows a gradual increase in GDP growth rate and regards Cambodia as one of emerging Asia average of GDP between 2000-07 and 2013-18 [44]. A gradual economic growth remains strong at the average of 7.6 per annum from 1994 to 2015. The nation has reached a score at the lower middle-income economy in 2015. Still, the trend is slightly decreasing from 6.9 (2017-18) to 6.7 in 2019 respectively [46]. The growth was integral to exports of goods and services (mainly garments and tourism), which grew 19.6 percent a year over the same period. More importantly, around 3.6 million jobs in industry and services were created over the past two decades. The percentage of Cambodians living under the national poverty line fell from 47.8 percent in 2007 to 13.5

percent in 2014 [45], [46]. In short, liberal economic policies play an important role in democratic peace and growth for few decades after the 1993 UN-sponsored election.

Strengthening democratization, around 3,000 local and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) registered their organizations with the Ministry of Interior (MoI). Approximately, 350-400 NGOs are fully operated based on foreign financial assistance to promote democratic assistance and economic development in Cambodia [47]. As a result, the people have enjoyed peace, political stability and steady economic growth for nearly three decades. Finally, idealistic democratization contributed huge positive implications on Cambodians and the nation. It not only maintains peace, political stability, human rights but also promotes economic growth and prosperity for more than three decades. However, Cambodia's democracy withers and arrives at the brink of death in recent years. In this sense, the author continues the debate of pitfalls drawing upon discourse theorist perspective.

#### *B. Discourse Theorists' Views on Conflicting and Contesting Values of Democracy*

From a social constructionist standpoint, Crotty states, "Meaning is not discovered but constructed. Meaning does not inhere in the object, merely waiting for someone to come upon it" [48, p. 42]. Crotty argues that humans assign meaning to their experiences and knowledge through logical reasoning, so language is central to this process [35]. Meanings are deeply attached to human needs, values and interests and the production of meanings is associated with their knowledge/power, beliefs, and experience [48], [49].

Drawing from the above arguments, there are two reasons why the notion of democracy becomes a disputable and resisting meanings between Westerners and Cambodian leaders. First, democracy is viewed as Western ideological hegemony and values imposed on former communist leaders who have still applied traditional ways of political patronage-based practices, kinship relationship, and family and personal networks [4], [50]. The language is hardly accepted as the universal truth and the truth is not readily resided in their archeological knowledge and mentality. Thus, they have paid less attention to the 1993 UN-made democracy.

Secondly, Cambodian leaders who their mentality in favor of communism and those who were trained in the Anglo-American or Western-educated systems are competing for power for their political interests. Consequently, the power transformation by elections has failed in Cambodia because "*neopatrimonial inhibits the transformative power of elections by preventing the emergence of resolute democratic ideals, reform-minded elites and pro-democratic institutions*" [51, p. 135]. A three-decade election has given the Prime Minister a democratic alchemy and allowed him to seize power in a pluralistic sheen of his parliamentary and judicial systems [7]. After a 30-year service, "*Instead of advancing democratic principles, the outcome had reinforced the notion that democracy was an indulgence of those in power*" [7, p. 109].

In sum, the discourses underlying these different values and

meanings compete for dominance, creating social tensions and conflicts and raising issues of contesting and conflicting discourses about democracy. The question of whether Cambodian leaders' beliefs and knowledge are still aligned with Western democratic values. Drawing from these views, the author reevaluates the pitfalls of democracy using realism for some critiques of utopian ideal and offers particular views on why Western democratic missions do not work well in Cambodia.

### *C. Realists' Critiques of Democracy*

#### 1. Geopolitical Power Struggle

From structural realism, there is a debate on a power struggle and zero-sum game in two ways in anarchic world of politics. John Mearsheimer, on one hand, argues that offensive realists often calculate how much power is enough to pursue their ideological and geo-economic hegemony on other states. On other hand, defensive realists also calculate how much power states want to protect their own interests and national sovereignty [34]. Small states may find it difficult to understand how much power offensive ones need and to comprehend the intensions in terms of their strategic goals. For instance, offensive realists such as the U.S, China and Russia and European Community may attempt to seize power and establish themselves as dominant countries in the world. These privileged countries have knowledge and power to transform their capacity and to intervene and change a series of events for achieving their real economic and political interests in order to dominate others [52]. One powerful nation can achieve its objective because the powerful nation has "privilege and statutory authority" to act on others [52, p. 792]. Paulo Freire argues that oppressing groups may use humanitarianism techniques to conceal interests and objectives over the marginalized [53]. This means that if power and knowledge are held by powerful nations, small nations may not understand the powerful countries' capabilities of controlling allocated and redistributed natural and economic resources.

For instance, China may use Cambodia as a geopolitical platform, thus increasing loan-and-grant intakes in a bid to geo-economic imperialism, geopolitical goals, and South China Sea claim. Recently, Chinese government offered \$5 billion in loan between 2011 and 2015 and pledged more \$7 billion in other investments through their private companies. They have proposed a huge infrastructure project that costs around \$26 billion in coming years [54]. This issue raises a question whether the Cambodian government really understand China's intentional goals? Is the country in the middle stage of a Debtbook Diplomacy cycle or Debtbook South or in the middle stage of geo-economic war [54]? This scenario would pose threats to Cambodia's national security, politics and economic dependency. Or may Cambodia fall into a proxy platform of ideological, economic, military and political competition in the future? In conclusion, both offensive and defensive realists beget the appetite for power and establish a zero-sum game to pursue and protect their national interests in Cambodian soil. The offensive mental moods and behaviors could intensify a regional security competition and tension among transnational

states.

#### 2. Foreign Aid Dependency

Another pitfall is partly associated with foreign aid dependency. After the 1991 Paris Peace Accord, Cambodia has received the financial assistance from international foreign institutions and donor countries for social and economic reconstruction and peacebuilding. In Table I, the amount of funds in the form of the official development assistance (ODA), or official development finance (ODF) from various bilateral and multilateral donors were distributed to help the country boost economic growth, peace and development. These amounts were allocated for public governance (USD 1.4 billion), health (USD 873 million), and transport (USD 1.9 billion) [55, p. 4].

TABLE I  
BILATERAL AND MULTILATERAL DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS IN CAMBODIA  
(2005-2014)

Donors	Type of Development Cooperation	Amount (US\$)
China	ODA	2 billion
Japan	ODF	1.2 billion
ADB	ODF	1 billion
USA	ODF	824 million
World Bank	ODF	705 million
Australia	ODF	624 million
Korea	ODF	552 million
Germany	ODA	463 million
France	ODA	407 million
EU	ODA	395 million

Source: OECD [ 55, p. 4].

According to the White House, the US government provided over \$ 1 billion to the Cambodian government to support economic, social and democratic development programs for over 25 years [56]. However, Cambodia's fledgling democracy has arrived at the turning point. The nation is likely to change a direction from democratic to authoritarian system [6]. First, the government has gradually obtained the lower level of Western democratic assistance. Recently, the White House announced that the US government suspended its financial democracy assistance because America does not want to see its taxpayers' money are wrongly spent on anti-democratic regime [56]. The OECD shows that the current funds disbursed for the health sector, disaster mitigation and peacebuilding have gradually decreased [55].

Secondly, economists predict that any recipient nation relying on foreign aid would reduce its accountability to the public and decreases government's incentives to levy taxes; and resort to authoritarian system [57], [58]. Third, the Cambodian government recently has sought for a new partner such as China to replace Western donor countries. Beijing has increased loan-and-grant financial assistance through trades and investments [59]. The US Congressman was quoted as saying, "While hopes for democracy have disintegrated, China has moved to dramatically expand its presence and power in the country" [8, para. 12]. Finally, Cambodia's democratization relies on overseas financial assistance. It is implicated with coercive

foreign policy agendas and aid conditionality embedded with donors' political ideologies, geo-economic goals.

### 3. Structural Oppression and Corruption

*Structural sense oppression refers to the vast and deep injustice some groups suffer as a consequence of often unconscious assumptions and reactions of well-meaning people in ordinary interactions, media and cultural stereotypes, and structural features of bureaucratic hierarchies and market mechanisms* [60, p. 41].

The structural oppression becomes a dominant political discourse in an authoritarian-ruled society and is systematically rooted in institutional systems [60]. *"Oppressing discourse is established and circulated between the oppressed and oppressors once conflicting interests are involved"* [53, p. 124]. The structural oppression is characterized in two dimensions in Cambodia. First, the judiciary and state institutions are not sufficiently impartial and independent to protect the ordinary people and sometimes those agencies are employed to oppress and marginalize their own citizens [61]. Misuse of justice system, corruption in legal system, insatiable appetite for authoritative power. The ruling party-controlled courts have been utilized as an instrument for the structural oppression commonly seen among police and armed forces. The courts, army and police forces are politically tied to the ruling party-governed government [62], [63]. These actions establish the so-called "soft-authoritarianism", "enlightened despotism" or "guided democracy" [4, p. 198]. Eventually, the government is hardly able to provide better social justice and human rights to citizens that may create a gloomy future of democracy.

Secondly, Cambodian democratization is undermined by institutional corruptions. The country has been inflicted by a broad systematic and institutional corruption, and nepotistic system.

In the Cambodian system, state and political leaders exit at the top of a pyramidal structure of relationships. The leaders who rise to the top retain their power by funding the people who put them in power. Equally, those who aspire to elite positions must generate support by paying supporters. For many loyal political followers, an excellent guarantor of reliable remuneration is from within political office itself. From such position, bribes can be elicited from both domestic and international sources [64, p. 31].

Referring to quote, Cambodia is still authoritarian-based rule and political patronage-based culture. The faithful political followers always gain benefits from corruption, while the top political leaders gain support from them. Cambodia receives a lower score of 161 in the Corruption Perceptions Index among 180 nations [65]. In a corrupt practice, the allegation of fraud was found within a \$42 million World Bank military demobilization project in 2003. Other irregularity of misprocurement on a \$6.9 million contract was detected by the World Bank [7]. "Each corruption scandal followed a similar pattern: more finger-wagging from donors, more government promises, and more fruitless monitoring schemes" [7, p. 93]. A groundbreaking report from Al Jazeera by Mary Ann Jolley

called "Threats and Corruption: Behind the Scenes of Cambodia's Election Crackdown"- found that corruption among Cambodia's ruling party elites widely spread out beyond the country's borders, all the way to Australia, particularly the case of Director General of Taxation [66, para. 17]. The Four Corner Report called "Champagne with Dictators" found that corruption is cementing their grip on power. Prime Minister's family and cronies are accused of amassing enormous wealth through a corrupt and nepotistic system [8, para. 7]. In sum, structural oppression by means of courts and armed forces and institutional corruption by means of favoritism, kinship, personal ties, marriage bonds, family relationship and political affiliations have already ruined a newly implanted democratization.

### 4. From Democracy, Kleptocracy to Autocracy

Cambodia has been transformed from democracy, kleptocracy to autocracy in two reasons. First, several researchers find that business and political elites intend to explore and control natural resources through rent-seeking methods. If natural resource exports contribute to 25-30 percent of GDP; the level of hazard of renewed conflict is high [57], [67]. And when marketable and valuable resources are legitimately or illegitimately occupied; social tensions and ethnic conflicts regularly occur among the elites, ethnic groups, and local communities [68], [69]. In 2014, 55 percent of 590 interviewees agreed that Cambodia was not on the right track of democratic system [41]. The negative implications were marred by massive systematic and institutional corruption, and deforestation, and forced eviction [42]. A research conducted by Collier and Sambanis in 2004, indicates that if any government relies on natural resources as national revenues rather than taxations from their citizens, the government tends to be less accountable and detached from an electoral process [68].

The above arguments reflect current articles from the Global Witness. A series of reports includes *Hostile Takeover: The Corporate Empire of Cambodia's Ruling Family* [70], *Country for Sale* [71], and *Cambodia's Family Tree* [72]. All these reports demonstrate how Cambodia's political elites have successfully managed to explore the country's natural resources for their own interests and personal fortunes through a systematic and institutional corruption and nepotism. They may revert the nation from a democratic system to authoritarian one.

Second, top leaders could maintain their power through private political patronage. In this circumstance, political elites are willing to "loot rents rather than invest in the public good of economic growth" [57, p. 328]. Those who have good networks of political patronage-based systems have more opportunities to control resources for their economic interests [73], [74]. Also, when government revenues are dependent on natural resources, the development of other sectors such as manufacturing and textile industries are slow and become stagnant [57]. The total effect can be an inability of government to compete with other countries' exports, to address outside economic change, to cope with national income loss, and restore a destabilized economy [57].

In short, offensive realists intend to calculate their power through ideological hegemony and geo-economic goals in Cambodia. While defensive realists compute their power through foreign aid dependency, structural oppression, corruption, and kleptocracy. Thus, democracy works well for elite groups who hold an absolute power. These factors may bring the country into a false consciousness of democratization. Finally, the seed of democracy may be unearthed and the hubris of democratic system may disappear in the near future. Geopolitical and economic crisis is questionable for its own citizens.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

A geopolitical power struggle and zero-sum game among offensive realists such as Western states, U.S. and China have changed Cambodian leaders' mood and mentality. Defensive Cambodian realists are still applying authoritarianism-based rule and politically based-patronage structures and arrangements to calculate and maintain their power for political and economic interests. Their mindsets and behaviors are seen as anti-democratic tenets since the truth of democracy becomes a system-wide false consciousness. Therefore, the Western-imposed democracy is hardly tapped into longest standing leaders who hold an absolute power.

What happens next? If the bridge between Western donors and Cambodian government is broken down, the nation and citizens may face a dilemma. First, a young democracy and long-lasting peace, economic growth and prosperity may disappear in the near future. Second, if offensive realists still intend to calculate and pursue their ideological hegemony and geo-economic goals in Cambodian land, young Cambodian generations may be the next victims of geopolitical and economic war provoked by the powerful nations. Lessons learned from the past decades tell us the consequence of geopolitical war that led to a massive killing during the Khmer Rouge regime.

A real democracy requires a mutual respect and tolerance, and winners and losers can rematch with dignity and ethics. Cambodia's leaders may forget the internationalism of democracy, but geopolitical and geo-economic crisis do not forget them. Forestalling the slide into a future anarchic situation, the government should have proper foreign policies toward offensive realists. Cambodian leaders should pursue idealistic goals of democracy through realistic means based on social, political, economic and cultural contexts. Finally, a long-lasting peace requires a genuinely hybridized democratic system in which all concerned parties reconcile and harmonize their political and ideological discourses for the sake of common national interests.

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