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**Cambodian Participation in United Nations Peacekeeping  
Operations: “Soft Power Development”?**

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## **Cambodian Participation in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations: “Soft Power Development”?**

**Abstract:** Despite the vast literature on Western and Chinese soft power, the concept itself is relatively new in the context of Cambodia’s foreign policy. Grounded in the literature examining soft power, this article argues that a core component of Cambodia’s development thereof is understood via the country’s active engagement in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations. It examines in detail how Cambodia has developed its soft power resources and the outcomes thereof at the international and domestic levels, i.e., implications for improving the global security environment, mobilizing support for collective action, and increasing domestic support for the government. In addition, the realities of Cambodia’s soft power suggests that global news coverage is failing to report the role of Cambodian forces for peacekeeping missions – weakening the development of Cambodian soft power.

### **Introduction**

Over many decades, the involvement of United Nations (UN) member states in peacekeeping operations (PKO) has been generally linked with developed, Western countries’ contributions. However, there has been a rising number of smaller and developing countries in the activities of PKO worldwide since the end of the Cold War. A former Danish minister of foreign affairs writing as early as 1964, Per Hackkerup, noted the significance of small and developing countries in UN-sponsored PKO. He observed that “small countries have a vital stake in supporting the United Nations so that it becomes an effective instrument of the international rule of law.” (Abdullah, 2014). Leng (2016) points out that Cambodia can be regarded as a small state.

After three decades of civil war and international isolation, Cambodia has returned political stability and international recognition following a two-year transition under the United Nations (Var, 2017). The legacy of United Nations peacekeeping operations in Cambodia, which took place for 18 months from March 1992 to September 1993 created a normative rationale for Cambodian government contributions to the United Nations Peacekeeping Missions. Various scholars have defined ‘peacekeeping’ as a soft power tool which is embedded in foreign policy - Ume-Farwa (2016) argues that United Nations Peacekeeping Operations are a source of soft power. Therefore, it can be argued that Cambodia’s contribution to PKO under the UN banner in general is a reflection of its foreign policy orientation. Apart from supporting the containment of conflicts, PKO involvement also provides legitimacy to contributing states (Ryan, 2000). The deepening and widening of Cambodia’s UN-sponsored PKO interests has contributed much to the evolution of Cambodia’s soft power.

The realities of global politics in the twenty- first century illustrate that possession of hard power resources (military and economic capabilities) is necessary but not adequate to significantly determine international outcomes. States have thus started to mobilize their soft power capabilities to influence the behavior of other states (Tella, 2018). Small states face limited military and economic capabilities constraining their foreign policy options. Recognizing this reality, small states will opt to employ soft power currencies in the international politics as a means to diversify their foreign policy choices. The literature on soft power has long been the subject of significant debate, most recently with a strong focus on the soft power resources of the major powers, i.e., the United States and China. Limited research has been done on small states’ soft power. This paper seeks to fill this gap in the existing in the literature by examining Cambodia’s role in global peacekeeping. Moreover, it provides a set of policy recommendations relevant to both Cambodia itself as well for other post-genocide states such as Rwanda and East Timor, etc. The paper also examines how Cambodia can increase its soft power through the deepening of multilateral engagement. Cambodia’s commitment to enhanced regional cooperation is already seen through its active engagement in a number of regional and international forums such as the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), G20, WTO, as well as the United Nations (Sok & Var, 2017). Against this backdrop, this article addresses the following related questions: How is soft power defined within the Cambodian perspective? How should Cambodian soft power be developed as a foreign policy tool? By answering those questions can one begin to appreciate how the country is able to employ its soft power to achieve its foreign policy goals. Negative international perceptions of Cambodia continue, however by increasing soft power through the deployment of Cambodian peacekeepers under UN auspices, the international perception of Cambodia can be reframed: from a killing filed to a supporter of international peace and security.

Since 2006, it can be observed that Cambodia has actively participates in PKO forces as peacekeepers or observers to conflict areas in Middle East and Africa. Table 1 provides an historical account of Cambodia’s participation in UN peacekeeping missions. To date, Cambodia has deployed a total of 5,783 personnel (The Khmer Times, 2018).

**Table 1. Cambodia’s PKO involvement under the United Nations.**

Location	Mandate	Period of involvement	Strength of force	specialization
Sudan	United Nations Mission in the Sudan (UNMIS)	March 2005- July 2011	553 Contingent troop, military observer, experts on mission	Demining and disposal of unexploded ordnance

South Sudan	United Nations Mission in the Republic of South Sudan (UNMISS)	July 2011-Present	907 experts on mission, contingent troop, staff officer	Mine clearing
Central African Republic and Chad	United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad (MINURCAT)	September 2007-December 2010	42 contingent troop	Demining and bomb disposal expertise
Lebanon	United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL)	July 2010-Present	1578 contingent troop, staff officer	constructing bridges, roads, and buildings as well as demining
Mali	United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA)	April 2013-Present	1207 contingent troop, staff officer	Mine clearing and engineering
Central African Republic	United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA)	April 2014-Present	894 experts on mission, contingent troop, staff officer	Demining specialists
Abyei	United Nations Organization Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNIFA)	June 2011-Present	11 experts on mission, staff officer	Demining specialists
Darfur	African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID)	July 2007-Present	12 experts on mission	Demining specialists

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Source: Author's compilation; see: United Nations Peacekeeping, Thayer, C. (2014). *The Contrasting Cases of Cambodia and Vietnam: Active Engagement and Considering Engagement in the United Nations Peacekeeping Operations*. In A. Chiyuki & Y. Kuang Heng. *Asia-Pacific Nations In International Peace Support and Stability Missions*. The United States: Palgrave Macmillan, The Khmer Times.

The article is divided into five parts. Beginning with a brief discussion of research methods followed by a discussion of the conceptualization and operationalization of soft power in the case of Cambodia. The third section examines the broader literature on the topic as related to smaller states before discussing Cambodia's own development of soft power and its utilization. Finally, this article provides a set of policy recommendations regards next steps in the development and strengthening of Cambodian soft power.

## **Research Method**

This article employs a qualitative research design, which mainly centers upon a desktop review method of primary documents related to the use and development of soft power in Cambodia. This method involves analysis of Cambodian leaders' speeches, relevant government publications, and media coverage of the various elements of Cambodian soft power (i.e., UN PKO) as reported internationally and domestically.

Specifically, I examine relevant, official documents from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, the Office of the Council of Ministers, and the Ministry of National Defense. In addition to these materials, leaders' speeches from Cambodia Archives-Cambodia New Vision published by the cabinet of Prime Minister of Cambodia were examined in order to gain a deeper understanding of how the state has understood and developed the country's soft power.

By collecting, organizing, and synthesizing diverse sources of data on Cambodian soft power, a thorough picture of the realities of that soft power can be provided while also identifying new aspects that have not yet been examined in the existing literature on the topic. This particular study is thus able to provide the first comprehensive analysis of Cambodia's soft power through the lens of Cambodian peacekeeping missions.

### **1. Conceptualizing and Operationalizing Soft Power**

The concept of soft power was coined by Nye (1990, 2004, 2009), who defines soft power as the "ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payment". In other words, soft power is defined as cooptive behavioral power, meaning getting others to do what one wants. Soft and hard power are differentiated by the fact that in the latter is that coercive force is not deployed in order to change the preferences of an opponent. In addition, Nye defines soft power as that which employs a variety of resources such as culture and political values. Some scholars argue that when Nye first invented the term, his conceptualization of soft power merely reflected the realities of American soft power and that Nye excluded important elements such as investment, trade, formal diplomacy, and aid

(Kurlantzick, 2007). In terms of the development of soft power, Nye (2004) saliently pointed out that traditional hard power resources can generate soft power if hard power is employed towards economic aid and peacemaking, opening space for the role of peacekeeping in the development of a state's soft power.

For the purpose of this article, I base the conceptualization of soft power along the lines set out by Nye and recognize the outcomes of soft power as facilitating a framing of a state's action as both legitimate and as having moral authority on the global stage that facilitates global attraction, admiration, and aspiration. Rather than through the projection of hard power, the main element in Cambodia's soft power is its participation of in UN PKO – consistent with Nye's approach.

To operationalize a concept of soft power, there are four elements that we can measure, including: (i) the ability to improve the external security environment by projecting peaceful and attractive images of the country; (ii) the ability to mobilize other countries' support for foreign and security policies; (iii) the ability to increase the approval ratings of a leader, and (iv) the ability to improve domestic support for a government and enhance its positive global media coverage. Geun Lee (2009) contends that the soft power strategy of this category aims to project a peace-loving image of a country while it is either taking part in the international community as a new or transformed member. Similarly, Ogunnubi and Uzodike (2015) posit that the deployment of military tools in pursuit of peace and stability will remain a crucial part of a country's foreign policy. In other words, military hardware is a hard power asset but this asset can be converted into a soft power asset. In UN Peacekeeping Missions, the deployment of the peacekeeping troops win admiration from the international community. For example, UNIFIL Head of Mission and Force Commander Major General Michael Beary praised UNIFIL's core de-mining teams from Cambodia and China. "I wish to publicly acknowledge their professionalism and courage as they set about this work," (Pokharel, 2018). In the case of Cambodia, Prime Minister Hun Sen, has reaffirmed the Cambodian government's commitment and contribution to international peace and security despite the fact that Cambodian peacekeepers have died while participating in missions under the UN umbrella (Office of Council of Ministers, 2017).

Concerning the third element, i.e., increasing the approval ratings of leaders/domestic support for a government, Geun Lee (2009), strongly emphasizes the importance of the individual leader. One of influential ways of understanding the soft power strategy is in terms of national heroes. Kishore's and Jeffery's (2017) arguments substantially contribute to the understanding of domestic politics in Cambodia. They argue that post-independence Cambodia is linked with two names: Norodom Sihanouk and Hun Sen. Taking the leadership factor into account, Cambodian leader Hun Sen's foreign policy formulation is more pragmatic (Leng, 2016). Concerning global media coverage, this element is important in understanding soft power in that it can shape public opinion, according to experts in the media field (Otaibi, 2017). Surprisingly, the major global news coverage like CNN, BCC, and the Guardian did not cover the deaths of Cambodian peacekeepers; however, consistent coverage was given to the deaths

of Western peacekeepers. Such a bias in coverage clearly has negative consequences for small states that are seeking to increase their soft power through participation in UN PKO.

### **Building Soft Power in Small States: Challenges and Opportunities**

As noted in the outset, the international relations literature offers several interpretations of the term which was set out by Nye as a basis for the discussion in this article. Nye initially classified three dimensions of soft power: culture, ideology and institutions. This is subsequently revised to culture, political value and foreign policies. Other scholars, such as Elizabeth Economy, have identified additional sources of soft power, i.e. culture, education, and diplomacy (Pan, 2006). In this article, foreign policy is taken as the main instrument to analyze Cambodia's soft power. According to Nye (2004), when a country's foreign policy is placed within multilateralism rather than unilateralism, its soft power is increased. In order to influence other states, a state can make its power legitimate in the eyes of others through foreign policy that is perceived as both lawful as well as possessing moral authority. In other words, foreign policies can shape preferences of other states by adopting consistent values.

Some scholars contend that Nye's conceptualization of soft power is biased towards American soft power, neglecting the soft power realities of other countries, including middle and small states. Kurlantzick (2007) asserted that when Nye coined the term soft power, he ruled out elements like investment and trade and formal diplomacy and aid. Furthermore, Kurlantzick (2007) would have defined 'soft power' in a broader sense: the ability to get what we want through a broad spectrum of means, including culture, foreign policies, investment and aid, except the realm of security and military. Chong (2010), on the other hand, a proponent of small state soft power strategies, argues that the emergence of soft power under the notion of new public diplomacy and foreign policy in global information space will provide new ways of extrapolating the power projections of small states on the basis of the enlargement of their political economy potential, models of good governance, and diplomatic mediation. The new crop of studies addressing the importance of soft power – particularly those looking at the deployment of UN peacekeepers. Countries like Brazil, China, India, Nigeria, South Africa and Pakistan have been actively participated in the United Nations peacekeeping missions (Gupta, 2013; Tella, 2018; Stuenkel, 2016; Ogunnubi & Uzodike, 2015; Sha, Khattak & Attiq, 2016). According to Nye (2004), contributing foreign aid and peacekeeping places a state in a more positive light in the international system. Therefore, by providing peacekeepers under the banner of United Nations, those states are able to build their soft power. However, the dynamics whereby smaller states are able to develop that soft power and the challenges attendant with that develop remains largely unexamined in the existing literature. To begin to address this gap, a comprehensive study as to the development of soft power in a small state (such as Cambodia) is required.

Cambodia's soft power is derived from its commitment to multilateralism in the context of its participation in international institutions such as ASEAN, the Greater Mekong Subregion

(GMS), and the UN in pursuit of its foreign policy goals rather than embracing unilateralism. In the past decades, Cambodia has undergone decades of civil wars and genocide but Cambodia has transformed itself from a recipient country of UN Blue Beret deployment to become an active contributing country in UN peacekeeping operations (The Royal Government of Cambodia, 2018). One of the core components of Cambodia's foreign policy has been to promote peace and maintain international security (Sun, 2017). Despite the country's limited resources, the Cambodian government has committed itself to supporting international peacekeeping missions. The next section examines the compositions of Cambodia's soft power—ranging from projecting an image of Cambodia as a peace-loving country to Cambodia's role in multilateral engagement and the questions of domestic legitimacy and global news coverage.

## **Cambodia and Soft Power**

1. Soft power to improve the external security environment by projecting an image of Cambodia as “Peacemaker”

As a post-conflict society devastated by decades of civil war and genocide, Cambodia at present is in a new phase of its foreign policy, working to project a peaceful and attractive image of the country through participation in formal institutions, such as the UN and ASEAN. For soft power to exist, legitimacy/credibility is an essential element. According to Nye (2004), legitimacy has three salient sources. First, legitimacy can arise from the values possessed by the power-holder. Second, legitimacy can derive from the political, social and cultural institutions of a country. Third, legitimacy can stem from the methods used in the execution of foreign policy. Maintaining soft power in this context would suggest that Cambodia opts for the legitimacy that derive from foreign policies. Foreign policy can contribute to soft power when they view policies as legitimate and having moral authority.

As clearly articulated in the 2006 defense white paper and defense strategic review 2013, Cambodia will continue its efforts to participate with the UN in humanitarian peacekeeping missions under the UN's umbrella. To convey the image of a responsible state, Cambodia has committed to contributing to strengthen peace and security in a diversity of regions across the globe. Within the UN framework, since 2006, Cambodia has sent 5,783 personnel to join peacekeeping missions in number of countries that are hot spots in the world, namely Sudan, South Sudan, Lebanon, Central African Republic, Chad, Syria and Mali (Royal Government of Cambodia, 2018; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2017; The Khmer Times, 2018). Until now, Cambodian contributions to UN PKO have focused on niche capabilities such as demining, engineering (i.e. construction of roads, bridges, and barracks), the maintenance of public order, and the provision of military medicine and other humanitarian assistance including the provision of drinking water and medical treatment to local populations (Chheang, 2014).

Unfortunately, as a result of their peace mission, four Cambodian peacekeepers were killed in May last year; despite the human cost, Prime Minister Hun Sen reaffirmed the government's commitment and contribution of Cambodian peacekeepers to support international peace and security (Office of the Council of Ministers, 2017). The role of peacekeeping operations has become an integral part of Cambodia's diplomacy that helped promote the country's standing on the international stage (Sun, 2017). Cambodia's active participation in peacekeeping is an effective tool of soft power projection. Furthermore, countries successful in soft power projection, mainly, adopt a policy of non-interference in other states' affairs. In addition, Cambodia has not provided combat troops, but demining specialists, medics, engineers, and observers who fill the gap and are important for the success of the UN peace operations. And the reasons for it not providing combat troops, is to maintain consistency with its non-interference policy.

In order to improve its external security environment, the Cambodian government has deployed the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces in UN peacekeeping missions. According to the defense strategic review set out in 2013, the RCAF has exercised restraint to the highest level, constantly complying with the international law and with the outcomes of diplomatic and legal efforts in accordance with the guidelines of the Royal Government of Cambodia. As a result of the above efforts, countries in the region and the United Nations understood the actual situation clearly and supported Cambodia's efforts in seeking a peaceful solution. In other words, Phnom Penh has been trying to build peaceful diplomacy towards all nations in the region and in the world.

## 2. Soft Power for Collective Action

The second category of soft power is imperative for effective leadership in organizing collective action among countries, according to Lee (2009). Crucial to understanding contemporary Cambodia's foreign and security policies is the question of regional and international security engagement. As a relatively smaller and lower income regional power, Cambodia has adopted a neutral and balanced security policy that places considerable stress on bilateral and multilateral cooperation with ASEAN as the main gateway for Cambodia's engagement with the region and beyond (Chheang, 2013). Depicting itself as a responsible member of ASEAN, Cambodia has exercised its foreign policy and defense diplomacy on the basis of the ASEAN framework and ASEAN's collective identity. General Tea Banh, for example, has underscored the importance of Cambodian peacekeeping forces with the ASEAN collective identity. In April 2013 during the sending out ceremony of the Cambodian peacekeeping forces, Minister of Defense, General Tea Banh, said that:

“You have to remember that your identity at this time is not only representing Cambodian peacekeeping, but also the peacekeeping forces of ASEAN. Therefore, you have to behave well in order to maintain national dignity and to bring the fame of Cambodia to the international arena.” (Chheang, 2014).

Cambodia also hosted the third ASEAN peacekeeping centers network meeting. Prak Sokhonn, the chairman of Cambodia's National Coordination Committee of UN Peacekeeping Operations provided the keynote speech at the opening ceremony noting that the third ASEAN Peacekeeping Centers Network meeting offered a platform for participants to share views and experiences on peacekeeping missions and enhance relations among ASEAN peacekeepers (Parameswaran, 2015). It is worth noting that Cambodia led a second leading military UN mission among ASEAN member states (Var, 2017). In particular, Cambodia's apparent support of Malaysia's proposed establishment of an ASEAN Peacekeeping Force, comprising personnel from all ten ASEAN member states to serve the United Nations (Kumar, 2015). Furthermore, Cambodia has also helped boost the image of ASEAN on the international stage with its contribution to global peace. In the form of moral support, Cambodia continues to gather support for its foreign and security policies from ASEAN member states through the ASEAN Defense Ministerial Meeting Plus.

At the same time, Cambodia has emphasized its commitment under the framework of UN-sanctioned peacekeeping missions as the main tool for multilateral cooperation and defense diplomacy. Cambodia's Defense White Papers are the most authoritative source on the policy rationale behind Cambodia's commitment to UN PKO (Thayer, 2014). Cambodia's declaratory policy, as evidenced by the 2000 White Paper, states unequivocally that Cambodia intends to act as a responsible actor and will retain strong links with the UN. Furthermore, the 2006 White Defense Paper calls for international support to help build and strengthen the military's capacity to contribute to UN peacekeeping. In alignment with Cambodia's aspirations, the government has attached great importance to peacekeeping operations in order to involve in regional and international agreements and to contribute to regional and global peace and stability as well as to promote Cambodia's international credibility and national prestige through cooperation in peacekeeping operations (Var, 2017). Cambodia has boosted its soft power in the eyes of the world through its peacekeeping missions in Africa and Middle East through the increasing deployment of Cambodian peacekeepers.

Developing from these security policies, by the early 2000s, the RCAF was tasked to serve a new peacekeeping role in an attempt to support Cambodia's foreign policy objectives and the advancement of national interests. This was evident when Cambodia decided to bid for a nonpermanent UN Security Council seat for 2013-2014, labelling itself as a proud candidate, Cambodia proudly used its successful peacekeeping contribution since 2006 as a case to bid for a non-permanent seat on the security council in 2013-2014 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Cambodia, 2012). Recently, Cambodia was elected as Vice-President of 73<sup>rd</sup> session of the UN General Assembly and as a member of the United Nations Economic and Social Council, respectively (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Cambodia, 2018). This is a reflection of the country's commitment to the principles of the UN and its significant contribution to the organization's global peace efforts. At the 73<sup>rd</sup> session of the United Nations General Assembly, Prime Minister Hun Sen declared:

The UN peacekeeping forces play a vital leading role in these efforts. As a result, Cambodia greatly welcomes the vision of H.E. António Guterres, the UN Secretary-General, on peace-building and peace-keeping, particularly further paying continued attention to the conflict prevention. Cambodia is a consistent supporter of the architecture of peace and security of the United Nations. For instance, for the last 12 years, Cambodia has sent thousands of Blue Helmet forces to join peace-keeping missions under the umbrella of the United Nations. However, peace-keeping is facing unprecedented challenges since the non-state actors have waged rebellion wars against our peace-keeping forces, which have caused many lives and disabilities. We are sincerely indebted to the sacrifice of the UN peace-keeping heroes. Nonetheless, their death and sacrifice have not distorted our commitment to further contributing to the cause of this great mission (Office of the Council of Ministers, 2018).

This implies that Cambodia's contribution to the UN and global peace is widely recognized across the globe, reinforcing Cambodia's soft power and providing the basis for the pursuit of its foreign and security policy objectives.

### 3. Soft power and Domestic Regime Support

This category of soft power is geared towards domestic rather than international audiences. However, this category of soft power cannot absent the international aspect. In Cambodia, domestic political developments may be broadly described as political consolidation. The CPP-led government has thus embraced what has been termed a "hard approach" in order to consolidate its power (Leng, 2017). The government's hard approach has been aimed at paralyzing and dissolving Cambodia's main opposition party. While successful in terms of maintenance of power, these actions have also harmed the ruling party's popularity and the perception of legitimacy.

In order to buttress the government's popularity and legitimacy, the ruling party has adopted significant reforms with the aim of increasing government efficiency. The military reform, in line with the Rectangular Strategy, Phase III, considers as one of the outcomes needed to achieve government efficiency. This national strategic objective is aligned with Cambodia's ambition to increase its soft power. Notably, the contribution of peacekeeping will likely benefit both the Cambodian government and citizens. According to Chheang (2014) and Thayer (2014), the strategic rationales of the Royal Government of Cambodia in providing UN Peacekeeping stem from four main reasons. First, Cambodia seeks to improve Cambodia's national image and role on the international stage. Second, Cambodia's participation in UN Peacekeeping is seen as a part of the process of military reform. Third, participation in UN Peacekeeping provides economic benefits to the Cambodian governments and the military, e.g., an individual soldier can earn additional income via their participation in UN Peacekeeping. Fourth, engagement in UN peacekeeping demonstrates Cambodia's normative commitment to promoting peace and stability among neighboring and regional countries.

Despite its significant benefits for Cambodian peacekeepers, challenges remain when it comes to the deployment of troops on the ground in light of the very nature of the activity. This was clearly seen when four Cambodian peacekeepers were killed as a result of an attack two years ago (United Nations Peacekeeping, 2017). In response, Prime Minister Hun Sen called on the UN general staff operating in the Central African Republic to review their troops and improve security arrangement as such shortcomings would pose dangers to peacekeepers (Cambodia New Vision, 2017). Following this event, Prime Minister Hun Sen, along with his cabinet members, attended the ceremony at Phnom Penh International Airport before allowing the bodies of the soldiers to be transported to their respective hometown for funerals (Xinhua, 2017). In addition to the ceremony, Chhay Chamroeun, the wife of Mao Eng, who served as a nurse in war-torn countries abroad, has expressed high respect to the government by saying that:

“But to see the ceremony prepared [by the government], I am also excited because my husband is being honored, I feel it.” (Touch and Handley, 2017).

Imagery such as the return of Cambodian soldiers from peacekeeping mission serve to develop state-supporting nationalism that can help to further consolidate the regime through soft rather than hard means.

Another important element of this category of soft power is to showcase the role of the country’s political leaders on the international stage in order to increase the domestic popularity of the government. For instance, in a meeting between Prime Minister Hun Sen and employees in the district of Korng Pisey, Kompong Speu Province on 19 September, 2018 he emphasized that:

“I am going to go to the United Nations to bring some issues to attention of the world. I do not have the need to go to the UN to tell what and how Cambodia is. I will inform the General Secretary of the United Nations that I have my troops prepared and ready to go to other target countries [...] we have our troops in South Sudan, Lebanon, Mali, and Central African Republic. We will choose some more countries to send our peace keeping troops to. We will leave our door wide open for other countries to come learn from us about issues involving de-mining. We have this ASEAN Mines Centre in Cambodia, where they can come learn from it [...] I will talk about issues of the world” (Cambodia New Vision, 2018).

In short, Prime Minister Hun Sen sent a message to the United Nations and its own people that the government has a strong ambition to deploy more Cambodian peacekeeping troops to foreign countries. Moreover, Prime Minister Hun Sen also has also thanked the Cambodian people for supporting his foreign policy, especially the decision to deploy

Cambodian forces for peacekeeping operation, which has been framed as placing Cambodia in equal status and footing with other countries deploying troops in the UN peacekeeping operations (Cambodia New Vision, 2016).

#### 4. Global News Coverage

Global news coverage plays a central role in disseminating information about modern peacekeeping operation. In this sense, the role of media can potentially be both positive and negative in the context of UN peacekeeping missions. On the bright side, in Cambodia, for instance, the U.N used media to restrain negative perceptions of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) within the local population and to bring 90% of the Cambodian population to vote in that country's first democratic election (Holguin, 1998). Conversely, also within Cambodia, the prevailing news of the massacres of the ethnic Vietnamese, attacks on UN soldiers and civilians, harassment of opposition political parties, and incidents of renewed fighting had been spread over the preceding months of UNTAC. According to Doyle & Suntharalingam (1994), owing to disclosures from some officials within UNTAC, journalists had been drawn to the shortcomings of the administration with many having subsequently written off UNTAC as a failure.

For years, Cambodia has been portrayed with a broadly negative image by international media including, CNN, BCC, Channel NewsAsia, and Aljazeera etc. In line with this, there has been a considerable increase in media reporting on the negative aspect of Cambodia's politics, rule of law, human rights, governance, elections etc. As a result, the image of Cambodia has been deteriorating in the eyes of international community. International media rarely mentions positive aspects of the Royal Government of Cambodia, e.g., the achievement of the maintenance of national peace over the course of 25 years in the challenging environment of a post-genocide society.

In light of this issue, the Cambodian government needs to engage with media in order to rectify how it the country is framed internationally. According to Otaibi (2017), the media could be perceived as a soft power in and of itself with the view to influencing the public's opinion and views about the issues or subjects. Considering the strong attachment of Cambodia to state-protecting norms of sovereignty and non-interference in a country's internal affairs, the Cambodian government attaches great importance to UN peacekeeping missions in order to shape public opinion. Shortly after the incident with Cambodian peacekeepers in the Central African Republic, national media such as the Phnom Penh Post, Khmer Times, and Cambodia Daily provided coverage of the issue. Yet, surprisingly, the international news including CNN, BCC, and the Guardian, failed to report on Cambodia's human losses in supporting peace and security in Africa. For instance, CNN published set of United Nations Attack "Fast Facts" regarding violence against UN peacekeeping forces and listed down all incidents from 1990 to the present (CNN, 2018). However, CNN reported the incident on May 8 2017 but did not mentioned the role of Cambodian

peacekeepers. This has shown the disparity amongst the UN peacekeepers. The global latest data from comScore Multi-Platform Media Metrix reveals that those news outlets remain dominant in the global information market making the omission of coverage of Cambodia's efforts in UN PKO particularly negative for the development of the country's soft power (CNN, 2018).

Table 2 sets out a brief analysis of peacekeeping from developed countries and less developed/middle income countries. Peacekeepers from developed countries including France, Spain, and United Kingdom, while peacekeepers from least developed countries, namely Burundi, Cambodia, and Malaysia. These six countries were selected owing to the fact that they are actively engaging in current peacekeeping missions. In addition, I compare the trend of global media coverage in reporting the peacekeeping operations from six countries by looking at influential news brand in the world (CNN, 2018; the Guardian, 2015, 2017). The data shows that France is seen by international news as a major leading country in bringing peace to war-torn countries (40 reports). Yet global news coverage also reported the dark side of French troops accusing of sexual abuse in Central African Republic. The United Kingdom ranks second. The table illustrates that there are 27 reports of British troops in the UN-sponsored PKO. Likewise, the finding shows that Spain who reported UN peacekeeping missions scored 26 reports. Overall, the table confirms that developed countries had favorable views and consistent attention to their PKO commitments from international media.

Additional sources of evaluating global news coverage can be obtained from least developed countries under the UN-led peacekeeping force. The table further indicates that Burundi have received 16 reports from international news including both positive and negative views. On the bright side, global news coverage has covered the death and the deployment of Burundian peacekeepers. However, that media coverage also examined cases where Burundian peacekeepers have been involved in the killing and raping of civilians. The table also demonstrates the lowest in the number of reports from global media towards Cambodian peacekeepers, with only two reports, from Al Jazeera and Reuters. It implies that the selective global news coverage undermines the development of soft power through commitment to peacekeeping from states that are not among the middle or great powers. Finally, Malaysia received 7 reports from international media in terms of peacekeeping operations. Measured in terms of number of reports from global news coverage, the result confirms that peacekeepers from smaller powers had minimal or primarily negative attention from global media.

## **Conclusion**

Cambodia's soft power capacity remains limited because Cambodia does not have ample soft resources. In addition, Cambodia has a relative lack of both hard and soft power. For instance, according to global firepower, Cambodia is ranked 102 out of 136 countries in terms of military strength, while on economic indicators, Cambodia is ranked 22 out of 43 countries in Asia Pacific (Index of Economic Press, 2018). In regard to soft power, Cambodian government has never declared culture, political value and foreign policy as soft power resources. However, Cambodia has been trying to increase its soft power through the deployment of Cambodian peacekeeper forces under the banner of the United Nations. The ability of Cambodia to promote itself as a model society in its evolution from a country wrought by war and conflict to an era of peace and security is closely related to its foreign policy and national interests.

Given this, directing national resources to support improvement of the international security environment via participation in PKO is imperative for Cambodia to project an image of itself as a responsible country in the region and in the world. Cambodia's engagement with the United Nations and ASEAN on the maintenance of regional and global peace and security has been an important component in the development of Cambodia's soft power. To optimize its soft power in the coming years, Cambodia needs to continue its strong commitment to the promotion of global peace.

In addition to the international aspects, there is also the question of the domestic effects of Cambodia's role in UN PKO. Specifically, peacekeeping appears to be a source for domestic legitimation of the current regime and for consolidating popular support for the prime minister. Finally, in the case of international media – global news coverage of Cambodia's peacekeeping work remains very limited/weak, undermining the development of the country's soft power.

## **Policy Recommendations**

Grounded in the discussion set out above, this paper concludes by offering a set of recommendations as regards next steps to further support the development of Cambodian soft power.

Option One: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and Ministry of Defense should work collaboratively as the following:

- Prepare and submit op-eds in top tier international media such as CNN, BBC, The New York Times when Cambodia sends peacekeepers abroad and Cambodian peacekeepers face violence in the field.
- Encourage Cambodian media experts to join international media conferences in order to facilitate deeper awareness of Cambodian support for peacekeeping abroad and a deeper awareness of Cambodia itself among the media outside of the country.

Option Two: The Cambodian government should have a clear-cut vision, demonstrating peacekeeping operations as a soft power strategy by:

- Clarifying its commitment to peacekeeping missions in the national defense strategy, including the defense white paper and the rectangular strategy.
- Making clear Cambodia's commitment to peacekeeping missions in diverse multilateral forums, such as the ASEAN Summit, ASEAN Regional Forum, ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meetings, and the United Nations General Assembly.

Option Three: In addition to strengthening its commitment to peacekeeping operation, Cambodia should develop a comprehensive national soft power development strategy that takes into account the full set of cultural, historical, and social resources at hand.

**Appendix: Table: global news coverage by selected top six news agencies.**

<b>Country</b>	<b>International News</b>	<b>Number of reports</b>	<b>Issues</b>
France	BBC	14	UN peacekeeping roles, providing training and logistical support, providing troops, children' abused by French troops, reducing the number of troops, suspending general over death, deploying of troops, French soldiers were killed.
	CNN	5	French peacekeepers were killed, two aid workers were killed, deployment of troops.
	Al- Jazeera	6	French troops remain in Mali, French soldiers were wounded, French peacekeepers accused of sexual abuse
	The Guardian	2	Child sexual abuse by France soldiers, three French soldiers killed in Mali.
	The New York Times	4	French troops killed in attack on U.N. convoy, French soldier accused of sexual abuse in Central African Republic.
	Reuters	9	Spanish al Qaeda commander killed by French forces in Mali, French soldiers were wounded, France troops deployed in the West Africa, French soldiers killed in Mali, French military bases was attacked, French military in Central African Republic, French troops kill deputy to veteran Islamist Belmokhtar, France conducted operating.
Spain	BBC	4	Spanish military helicopter crashes in Haiti, Spanish peacekeepers were died, the bodies of 62 Spanish peacekeepers killed when their plane crashed in Turkey have been flown home.

	CNN	9	Spanish peacekeepers were killed, Spanish peacekeeper died in a road accident, Spanish soldiers died due to helicopter crash, Spanish soldier dies in Afghan bomb attack.
	Al- Jazeera	1	Spanish peacekeeper was killed
	The Guardian	5	Spanish peacekeepers were killed, Spain calls for UN inquiry into death of Spanish peacekeeper in Lebanon, 62 Spanish peacekeepers die as plane hits mountain, Spanish troops killed in Afghanistan crash
	The New York Times	4	Spanish peacekeepers were killed in Lebanon, 62 Spanish peacekeepers die in plane crash, 17 killed in crash of Spanish military copter in Afghanistan
	Reuters	3	Spanish peacekeepers were killed.
United Kingdom	BBC	16	UK to step up Africa peacekeeping, UK's role in peacekeeping, UK troops rushed to Afghan riot, UK 'could lead Afghan peacekeepers, UK extends lead of Afghan force, British peacekeeper killed in Kosovo, British troops sent to Gulf, UK troops stretched to limit, UK troops to leave Afghanistan.
	CNN	6	Britain troops in Congo, Britain to lead Afghan peacekeeping effort, Britain ready to lead Afghan force, British troops have come under fire in Kabul,
	Al- Jazeera	1	International defense ministers are meeting in the UK to discuss ways to improve UN peacekeeping missions.
	The Guardian	3	UK to deploy troops to help keep peace in Somalia and South Sudan, How Britain and the US decided to abandon Srebrenica to its fate, British troops in South Sudan
	The New York Times	0	None
	Reuters	1	Britain's military mission in Sierra Leone

Burundi	BBC	5	Burundi peacekeepers in Somalia 'unpaid', the African Union wants peacekeepers from Burundi, Burundi soldiers begin training, Burundi joins Somalia peace force.
	CNN	3	Burundi soldiers were killed in Somali, Burundi forces make-up of the bulk of AU mission in Somali.
	Al- Jazeera	2	AU troops killed in Somalia clashes
	The Guardian	1	Burundian troops serving under the African Union Mission in Somalia (Amisom) are alleged to have opened fire on four civilians
	The New York Times	1	Burundi's forces are engaging in gang rape
	Reuters	4	Burundi's peacekeepers were wounded, fearing genocide, ex-Burundi presidents plead for U.N. troops, Burundi to accept a deployment of international troops, Burundi and Uganda both have about 2,500 peacekeepers in the Somali
Cambodia	BBC	0	None
	CNN	0	None
	Al- Jazeera	1	Four UN peacekeepers killed in Central African Republic
	The Guardian	0	None
	The New York Times	0	None
	Reuters	1	Four UN peacekeepers killed, eight wounded, in Central African Republic
Malaysia	BBC	1	Malaysia will contribute troops to East Timor
	CNN	2	Malaysia, Indonesia ready to send troops, Malaysian peacekeepers to monitor PH-MILF pact

Al-Jazeera	0	None
The Guardian	0	None
The New York Times	1	Somali Gunmen kill 2 Malaysian soldiers
Reuters	3	Malaysian troops arrive for U.N. duty in Lebanon, Malaysia to withdraw peacekeepers from Philippines, Malaysian peace monitors quit south Philippines.

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