

The cambodia vietnamese war history essay



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The Cambodia-Vietnamese War was a series of conflicts involving various nations such as Cambodia, Vietnam, Hanoi, China and the United States of America. It was a conflict that flourished from border disputes between Cambodia and Vietnam. Minute aspects that contributed to this controversy stretched as far back as the 14th Century, when the Khmer Empire declined and when Khmers and Vietnamese dealt with an uneasy integration in an atmosphere of suppressed mistrust. The formlessness of the conflicts has made it difficult to identify the time frame unerringly but has been gauged that it occurred between 1975 and 1989. However, the war's foremost conflict was the Cambodian Incursion by the Vietnamese in 1978. It is debatable to affirm if this controversy can be justified accordingly. By examining the manifold of causes and effects of the conflict with close study to the Just War Theory to substantiate my view, I will elaborate on why I think that a form of equilibrium has been established of the war in terms of being unjust or otherwise.

Vietnam possessed no precise or pertinent reason to invade Cambodia.

Emory Swank, the U. S. Ambassador to Cambodia came to a conclusion that " The war is losing more and more of its point and has less and less meaning for any of the parties concerned." (Schanberg and Pran 11). This is relative to the border disputes because of the U. S. involvement in providing military assistance for General Marshal Lon Nol, who overthrew Sihanouk in 1970, in Cambodia during the war. However, the Just War theory criteria, Jus ad bellum, states that a party must possess the right intention to go to war, and in turn will be granted the right to go to war (Just War Theory, The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy). Cambodia and Vietnam's feeble relationship

fortified in 1965 when Prince Norodom Sihanouk of Cambodia, despite mistrusting the Vietnamese, allowed North Vietnamese Communists to “establish ‘sanctuaries’” inside the borders of Cambodia (Schanberg and Pran 11). After North and South Vietnam signed an agreement in Paris on January 27th 1973, Cambodian communists were left to stand alone. This being the basis of the international relationship provoked many controversies, but never provided Vietnam with a commensurable rationale to invade Cambodia.

The invasion into Cambodia by the Vietnamese was a disproportionate response to the 2-year long border dispute between the two countries. According to Jus ad bellum, the “goal attained should be in proportion to the offence” (Just War Theory, The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy). However, over two million lives were at the expense of “settling disputes” between two countries. It is impossible for Vietnam’s eventual goal to measure up and find equilibrium with the execution of over two million inhabitants. The invasion failed to ameliorate, furthermore prevent more evil than it caused. According to statistics, a larger amount of people were directly affected by the invasion and massacre rather than the series of border conflicts. Thus, the invasion failed to prevent more human suffering than it caused. According to the theory, “the means used to fight must be in proportion to the wrong to be righted”. (Just War Theory, The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy) However, the lives of a massive number of people were at the expense of the Vietnamese invasion, therefore, with humanity at stake, the goal cannot be compared to the evil committed in this incursion.

Thirdly, the Cambodian incursion was not a last resort for the Vietnamese. According to the Just War Theory criteria, *Jus ad bellum*, a war is justified when only after all “ viable alternatives have been exhausted” (Just War Theory, The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy). In this case, the Vietnamese offered a diplomatic solution to the conflict, such as the establishment of a demilitarized zone along the border of the two countries, but was eventually rejected by Pol Pot, the leader of the Khmer Rouge in that period. A single attempt was made by the Vietnamese, indicating the possibility that more could have been done to prevent the provocation of the war. Therefore, because other possibilities and alternatives were never explored or exhausted, the invasion into Cambodia was not a last resort for the Vietnamese.

The Vietnamese made no distinction between combatants and non-combatants of the war, thus resulting in an indiscriminate attack of Cambodia. It has been proven that a massacre of about one million Cambodians took place in the Cambodian incursion. According to the Just War theory, *Jus in bello*, non-combatants and civilians should be spared so as to avoid terrorism of the people. Combatants would include members of military forces, guerilla forces or anyone who takes up arms but not for self-defense. Non-combatants would include civilians or neutral countries, children, the old and the sick (Just War Theory, The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy). The war sparked off when the Vietnam People’s Army (VPA) launched a massive invasion into Cambodia in 1978. They began a massacre of over a million people, and failing to distinguish between combatants and non-combatants of the war. According to the Just War Theory, the failure to

do so would indicate the lack of justification of a war due to the unlevelled playing field of the two parties, which would result in uneven and potholed consequences.

The VPA possessed excessive military force when invading Cambodia, without the limitation of unnecessary death and destruction of Cambodia and its civilians. In this 'bloody guerilla war', the amount of Vietnamese troops was almost 8 times the amount of Cambodian troops. According to the Just War Theory, *Jus in bello*, the principle of minimum force in a war needs to be appropriately applied, as well as attacking needs to stem from the intention of helping in military defeat (Just War Theory, The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy). The Vietnamese forces fell short of this as it resulted in the deaths of over a million civilians, the destruction of border villages and the abandonment of vast tracts of agricultural land. According to *Jus post bello*, goals of the war cannot be reached with excessive force, which the Vietnamese were in opposition of. The stringent lack of limitation of military forces showcases the Vietnamese's incorrect conduct within the war.

After the invasion, both countries suffered political, social and economical deteriorations. Slaughters, assaults, bombings and mass violence demonstrations affected the Vietnamese and Cambodians in terms of living standards, conditions and circumstances. A vast amount of property was destroyed which resulted in the overflow of refugee camps and the inhabitation of refugees in Phnom Penh specifically. Due to the large number of people, diseases in the area were rife. Also, food was scarce and malnutrition was a common situation. Medical attention was unable to be

provided as hospitals were overworked and under-equipped with few drugs available, thus resulting in the collapse of the medical system.

Political relations within different countries were also heavily impinged on. When the Khmer Rouge lost all political and military power, they suffered disintegrations through defections of the political and military system. The dimensions of Vietnamese colonization of Cambodia were also measured (Morris 224). For example, PRK was renamed State of Cambodia (SOC) in 1989 by the Vietnamese.

However, the Vietnamese communists managed to achieve their goal of overthrowing the Khmer Rouge regime. Vietnam also suffered from Chinese military pressure for over 10 years as well as receives international diplomatic isolation (Morris 222). Vietnam's alienation of international support was a result of their actions of invasion precluding any prospects of "imminent normalization with the U. S., as well as turned most of the Western and Third World nations against any cooperation with them" (Morris 222). This also meant war of Vietnam with China.

The Vietnamese invasion on Cambodia meant much economic alterations for both countries. The Vietnamese suffered from economic alienation and isolation which retarded the economic growth of the country. Cambodia's traditional economy was also all but vanished. As a result, inflation was extremely rampant in both countries.

According to the aftermath of the Cambodian incursion, neither of the countries seemed to have gained incentives and inducements from the war itself. In turn, both countries suffered major political, social and economical

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damage, causing a massive downturn in the establishment of the two countries.

However, probability for success for the Vietnamese was evident. There has been evidence of certain aspects of the incursion being justifiable. The Just War Theory criteria, *Jus ad bellum*, states that a country has the right to go to war when there is a probability for success (Just War Theory, The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy). It considers the ethics of causing suffering, pain and death to inhabitants of a country with no chance of success. In this case, the Vietnamese saw that their probability for success from the incursion would be higher than that of the Cambodians. As long as chance for success existed for either party in this war, the Vietnamese can then be granted the right to go to war in the first place.

Similarly, the Vietnamese had barely any supplementary alternatives to put an end to the various 2-year long disputes. After Pol Pot rejected Vietnam's diplomatic solution for the border conflict, a mutual understanding between the countries failed to exist. This made it tough for the Vietnamese to decipher a *modus operandi* to put a quick stop to the disputes. However, the invasion was merely not a last resort but more of an immediate solution for the Vietnamese. With harsh limitations and an inability to resist more animosity, the Vietnamese succumbed to war. In this context and within these circumstances, it is still possible for the conflict to be a just one.

Apart from accentuating the traditional animosities between Vietnam and Cambodia, furthermore, the was also managed to overthrow the Khmer Rouge from power as well as end the Khmer Rouge Regime Genocide. With

close relation to the Just War Theory, Jus ad bellum, Jus in bello, and Jus post bellum, I managed to differentiate the aspects into which exploit is just and what is otherwise. Moreover, though many factors proved the Vietnamese invasion to be unjust, the possibility of the incursion being a just war still subsists.