

# Evolution of the contemporary world system politics essay



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“ Together, all international actors and their interactions with one another form an international system” (Papp, 2002). Ironically, international system itself is also a very important body that greatly influences the behaviors and interactions of its creators, especially the states. There is no single global system that dominates the history of mankind. This system always evolves as the realm of power shifts together with the changing in the way that power is demonstrated. Remarkably, the 20th and the early 21st centuries have been a very dynamic period when there were frequent fundamental changes in world politics and international system.

The beginning of the 20th century, when states were still the solely crucial players, global affairs were under the Balance of Power System. This system came to an end together with the breakout of the World War I when the perception of balance of power was absent in the mind of state actors. Central power, namely German and Austria-Hungry, attacked the Allied countries consisting of France, Belgium, Serbia and others (Keylor, 2008). After the war, a new but short-lived system emerged, international collective security. Again this ineffective system “ ended in global conflict”, the World War II (Papp, 2002). It was the failure of the League of Nations when Britain and France ignored the German’ invasion of Poland. Following the horrifying and destructive war, Bipolar System made its appearance in world politics. The new system in which two super powers competed and dominated the international arena. By this time the world has already experienced the terror of nuclear weapon as two bombs were tested and demonstrated in Japan to conclude the war. Some arguments believe that this weapon of mass destruction also did contribute significantly in preventing direct war

between the U. S. and USSR, the war that could inevitably end the world as we know today. However, the effect of cold war between the two giants on smaller countries around the world still can be seen as bloody as the wars that came before it. Civil wars and proxy wars in Cambodia, Vietnam, Angola, Afghanistan, Korea peninsular and many other conflicts erupted with the two dominant ideologies acting behind the scene. This bipolar system was the main characteristic of the international affairs until the demise of Soviet Union at the end of 1991 that marked the official conclusion of bipolar world. From then, according to Charles Krauthammer, the United States is now the unchallenged power supported by its Western allies (Krauthammer, 2002). Therefore, the international system now becomes unipolar. Political and economic powers are the two most important variables in determining the strength of one state. With nuclear warhead and other advanced military technology, naturally, the United States gained significant amount of political power in international arena. More importantly, the U. S. is the world largest single economy thanks to its annum GDP worth of over 10 trillion dollars , more than one-sixth of world GDP (“ World development indicators,” 2010).

However, this claim did not address a number of fundamental changes happened even before the bipolar system ended. From the second half of the 20th century, there have been many remarkably and extremely important trends in global politics as well as the international structure. The emergence of nonalignment movement creates the single and stronger voice for the weak and poor states to bargain with the rich and powerful states, especially in the UN General Assembly. It was seen as the North-South conflict. The rise of China, India, and Brazil in their economic and political power is

questioning the dominant power and unilateralism of the U. S. in international affairs. For instance, the Chinese economic miracle from the 1970s has put the concrete role of China in global political arena again. China has been busy in advancing its military capability and inserting power and influence globally. The presence of Chinese investment in African sub-continent is the clear manifestation of Sino-expansion going global. From economic perspective, China is building up its economic empire, the process that requires a lot of resources from Africa; nevertheless, looking from political perspective, Africa holds about one-fourth of the UN General Assembly seats. Using power capital in Africa and other area, China can easily control the voting result at the UN. In addition, there are also other emergence of former powers as well such as Japan and Germany. Despite both countries still have limited military capacity in international arena, but as the third largest economy, Japan, and world biggest exporter, Germany, the two giant economic powers are also trying to increase their influences in world politics. As we can see that they have maintain the seat in the United Nation Security Council by using economic power such as bilateral aid.

New international actors such as Intergovernmental Organizations like the UN and NATO, regional grouping, the EU and ASEAN, and other International Nongovernmental Organizations like the ILO are also increasing their role in changing the world stage. States cooperate through those INGOs. For instance, through ASEAN, the countries in Southeast Asia are trying to limit the influences of great powers in their region. Even though it has not become powerful enough to achieve all its goal and objective, it surely has change the way in which international relations operate especially for the U. S. when it

deals with the countries in Southeast Asia. More importantly, the increasing power of Multinational Corporations and private power capital make the international affairs even more complex because those actors even have great influence in many domestic political affairs of many countries especially the developing countries, but their intention and goal are sole profit, which are so different from the state actor. Advancement of technology, communication, and transportation has helped the transnational social movement possible. From the woman rights groups to environmental advocates, they actively involve in world politics.

All of these changes and new actors have made the international system even more complex and complicated with so many level and facets. Understanding this contemporary state of affairs is extremely important for all actors to achieve their survival, goal, and objective. It is even more extremely significant for an actor like a weak state since it is the most vulnerable and sensitive to the decisions made in global affairs and world politics.

Cambodia was small and vulnerable country. During French colonial period, Cambodia was isolated from international politics for most of the time; however, at independence, this country faced its most critical challenge that was to survive and prosper in the arena of international political system. Unfortunately, the world politics at that time was not really a peaceful period especially for a newly independent country that has not established strong and stable political system not to mention other wide range of internal problems like economic underdevelopment, unemployment and poverty.

Stuck in the middle of cold war between two super powers, the U. S. and <https://assignbuster.com/evolution-of-the-contemporary-world-system-politics-essay/>

USSR, Cambodia understood very clearly that it has no choice but to play its part in the political game of bipolar system. Cambodia started to develop good relation with U. S. and received a lot of aids for its economic development. It also tried not to confront directly with the increasing-power communism. However, things changed rapidly when the Vietnam War started to spill over Cambodia. Prince Sihanouk cut off relations with the U. S. in 1965 in regard with U. S. bombing in the kingdom and the increase “ influence of American in Cambodia armed forces” (Lum, 2007). This move has put Prince Sihanouk in critical position for the U. S. Despite relation was restored in 1969, the coup led by Lon Nol and backed by the U. S. put a new government in Phnom Penh (Sophat, 2010). This marked the point of deep internal breach between Cambodians who supported Lon Nol’s regime and those who love the former one. The 30-year civil war began.

New government officially declared war against communist Vietnam to please the U. S. However, Lon Nol not only fought the North Vietnam but he also has to deal with Pol Pot, a rapidly increasing Cambodian guerrilla forces supported by communist Vietnam. Then in 1975, the Phnom Penh government collapsed and replaced by Khmer Rouge. Despite the killing in the country, this regime lasted until 1979 when the Vietnam launched full-scaled military attack against Pol Pot’s regime. After the regime was forced out of power, Cambodia was still struggling in civil war having three fractions backed by different foreign actors fighting along the north and western borders. Khmer Rouge supported by China, and the free Khmer groups gained the support from the U. S. Inside the country, new government has aligned itself with the East block, which was Soviet Union, and maintained a

very close relation with Vietnam. The situation more or less remained hostile for another decade. The dark age of Cambodia only came into an end in 1993, the election led by the UN has helped unified the country again once again in a very long time. Khmer Rouge was still fighting, but without any support from outside powers, its role was not significant anymore. The history gives one invaluable lesson for Cambodia: to deal with foreign power carefully and be friend with all of them.

Cambodia After the 1993 UN-backed election, as small and developing country, Cambodia turned around its foreign policy and welcomed the world for friendship, diplomatic relations, and cooperation. Cambodia has been perusing a very friendly foreign policy with its neighbors, other ASEAN states as well as world great and super powers. Close ties with the West were also soon established. In 1995 and 1995, the United States and Japan agreed to increase foreign aid and investment in Cambodia. Then in 1997, the military conflict between the two ruling political parties resulted in the prolonging of Cambodia admission into ASEAN and the termination of Western aid and investment. Cambodia again turned to Chinese both economic and political support. Having only China as friend is not the best option, Cambodia needed to make as many friends as possible including the West. So the new democratic election was organized in 1998 to please the Western states.

The situation started to recover after the formation of coalition government in 1998. Relations with the West resumed. The European Union and Japan announced the reestablishment of economic link with the Kingdom again. In May 1999, finally, Cambodia was officially accepted as the latest member of ASEAN. This has opened way and opportunity for Cambodia to fully engage <https://assignbuster.com/evolution-of-the-contemporary-world-system-politics-essay/>

in regional economic and political conferences. The same year in June, there was a visit by Vietnamese Communist Party officials, and the two countries agreed to end border disputes. However, the tension between Cambodia and Thailand continued. Though the relation was still remain calm until an incident when rioters burned the Thai embassy and several Thai companies operating in Phnom Penh on 29th June, 2003 (" Cambodia - Foreign policy," 2003). Later the situation was controlled, and after the compensation was paid to Thailand side, the relations between the two countries were normalized. Until 2008, a new conflict erupted over the Preah Vihear Temple and border dispute. As a weaker and smaller country, Cambodia sought multilateral negotiation to settle the problem. Trying to send the case to the UN and ASEAN, the efforts were unsuccessful because Thailand is the close ally with the U. S., which is a member of the UN Security Council and holds veto power. Even worse, Thailand was in its term as the chairman of ASEAN. Cambodia's relations with southern neighbor, Vietnam, have been complex but have gradually improved since the 1993 UN-sponsored election. Though, it is a very sensitive over the border issues between the tow countries. In late 2005 both sides ratified the " Supplementary Treaty to the 1985 Treaty on the Delimitation of the State Border between Cambodia and Vietnam" (" Cambodia Foreign Relations," 2009). The planting of border markers began 2006 and are expected to be concluded by late 2008

On economic area, Cambodia experienced rapid growth of over a decade. Cambodia has liberalized its market. It welcomes foreign investment and promotes trade regionally and globally. In 2004, Cambodia also became the member of the WTO. Recognizing the importance of non-state actors,  
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Cambodia also welcomes many of them in building the country. Cambodia is a member the International Monetary Fund (IMF), International Labor Organization (ILO), the World Health Organization (WTO) and the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO). Civil society has growth rapidly inside the country like Trade Union. The presence of MNC like KFC and other companies is the manifestation of fast growing economy and cultural and social integration to the outside world.

Comparing to the past, the current international system is surely better and much more peaceful for Cambodia. To some extent, Cambodia can make a lot of decisions that benefit itself. Almost half a century and before 20 years ago, Cambodia was stuck in the middle of the Cold War, much of its decision was determined by the condition of that time international system. The game played by great powers now seems much more peaceful for Cambodia. Even China, as cited by Chinese official, see that Cambodian enjoy peace process is the example of the benefits of increased cooperation between the US and China (“ Cambodia slammed in the latest Wikileaks Cables,” 2010). Being friend with the major powers is the hard lesson Cambodia learn from the past when the country was divided into many fragments fighting internally. Each fraction was supported by different external players.

Not only state actor, Cambodia also sees a lot of opportunity with the non-state actors. While listening to the INGOs and NGOs and gaining aids and support form them, the country seems very sensitive to any critics raised by those actors. Cambodia also seems to be more focus on economic policy for the countries development as a whole. Enjoying the peace with the

remarkable economic growth for the last decade or so, the future of the <https://assignbuster.com/evolution-of-the-contemporary-world-system-politics-essay/>

Kingdom looks very promising. However, the dynamic of international arena is very certain. The rise of China power in global politics as well in region, even without apparent concern, Cambodia surely comprehends. Despite Cambodia seems to be enjoying internal sovereignty, Cambodia external action is still very limited by the fact that it is a small size with little population, and the government's budget is still rely on external loan and aid. While internal political landscape is changing, what Cambodia can do for now may just try to strengthen its internal capability and hope that the current situation will last a bit longer.