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BOOK REVIEW

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Vietnam's Intervention in Cambodia in International Law. Gary Klintworth. Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1989. Pp. 193. Paper, \$24.95.

Gary Klintworth is a Senior Research Fellow at Australian National University, Canberra. He is both an international lawyer and a strategic analyst and served as an Australian Army Intelligence Officer specializing in Cambodian affairs. In this book he examines the 1978 Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia from the perspective of international law and concludes that this military action can be deemed both an act of legitimate self-defense and an example of humanitarian intervention because Vietnam, in staving off Cambodian aggression, also rescued the Cambodian people from the genocidal horror of the Pol Pot regime.

The concept of humanitarian intervention has been gaining international acceptance, or at least passive acquiescence, in recent decades especially in cases where the intervening nation withdraws its troops at the earliest available opportunity, thereby demonstrating its good faith. The Indian invasion of East Pakistan in 1971 and the Tanzanian invasion of Uganda in 1979 are frequently cited as classic examples of humanitarian intervention which ameliorated the plight of millions of hapless victims of oppression.

However, there are serious problems implicit in the widespread acceptance of the idea of humanitarian intervention as a legitimate state action. First, the concept may be a violation of the United Nations Charter which states "[a]ll Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations." The Charter further limits the resort to force to "individual or collective self-defense if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations, until the Security Council has taken measures necessary to maintain international peace and security." Should intervention be necessary, such action would be under United Nations auspices according to Chapter VII of the Charter. Clearly, the Charter does not give carte blanche to individual states to intervene unilaterally in the internal affairs of another nation.

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^{1.} U.N. CHARTER art. 2(4).

^{2.} Id. art. 51.

²³ CORNELL INT'L L.J. 511 (1990)

Despite these prohibitions on the use of force, it has to be remembered that the United Nations is also actively committed to implementation of its various human rights instruments. When a government which commits genocide against its own people clearly violates these international agreements, there may well be a need for a neighboring state to intervene to reestablish the basic rights of the victimized population. Such action might include the overthrow of the government committing genocide. This is obviously a case of conflicting values (state sovereignty vs. human rights considerations) and one which requires much soul searching.

The opponents of humanitarian intervention point to the U.N. Charter and caution against any justification for violating the territorial integrity of a nation state. The statist emphasis of global politics would clearly be at odds with any notion of a nation's obligation or right to interfere in the internal affairs of a sovereign state. Those who oppose the concept emphasize the likelihood of abuse of the idea of humanitarian intervention by a state seeking economic or political domination and using humanitarian reasons as a cloak for its real motives.

The use of humanitarian intervention would dictate different priorities; priorities which would rank the rights of peoples far above those of their governments. If there are gross violations of human rights involving mass extermination and torture, the proponents of intervention argue that non-intervention is the most crass form of cruelty and indifference to the plight of the victims. As Fonteyne in his Introduction to this book explains:

If one therefore accepts that preservation of human life (rather than the sanctity of the nation-state) is at the apex of an universal scale of values, the prevention of persistent, large scale threats to such life has to be regarded as the ultimate goal of the United Nations system . . .³

The problem is compounded by the fact that the United Nations has not lived up to the precepts of the Charter. The chasm between internationalist principles and actual U.N. practice is now so wide that the world organization is generally deemed to be incapable of effective implementation of its own Charter. The existence of the veto in the Security Council has hindered U.N. action on a number of occasions. The very powers which should lead by example toward U.N. aims, paralyze the organization by lending support to client states which flout the principles of international law, secure in the knowledge that their patron states in the Security Council will prevent any retributive action. This is precisely what happened with Cambodia. Although U.N. action might have been the most desirable alternative, it was not forthcoming, mainly because China (Pol Pot's patron), a permanent Member of the Security Council, could hinder any U.N. measures.

^{3.} Fonteyne, *Introduction* to G. Klintworth, Vietnam's Intervention in Cambodia in International Law at xii (1989).

Klintworth begins his study of the Vietnam-Cambodia war in this book by explaining the geographic and historical background of Cambodia, a small country with a population of 6.5 million with large neighbors—Thailand (population 54.5 million) and Vietnam (population 65 million).⁴ Internal dissension and foreign interference have marked Cambodia's violent history. In 1975, one faction of the Khmer Rouge overthrew Lon Nol and assumed power under Pol Pot. Soon after, "the killings began." As Klintworth explains:

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Life became much tougher, food rations were cut and it was soon apparent that the goal of the new Cambodian rulers was to radically change the nature of Khmer society. Professional, intellectual or technical people were, apparently, not needed. Merchants, bankers, teachers, lawyers, civil servants, doctors, dentists, dressmakers, railroad engineers, pedicab drivers, cooks, waiters, maids and truck drivers were unwanted "leeches and parasites." Cities were viewed as creatures of Western influence, centres of decadence and conspicuous consumption, and impediments to change. Technology, money and trade were regarded as evil.⁶

The horror lasted for three years, from 1975 until the Vietnamese intervention in late 1978. Sir Robert Jackson, Under Secretary General and Senior Advisor to the United Nations described Cambodia as suffering:

ceaseless killings . . . torture, persecution, iron discipline ruthlessly imposed, hunger, starvation, deprivation of even the most elementary essentials of life. Some of the methods of torture and execution were, if anything, more obscene than those practiced by the Nazis and degraded the human mind and body in ways never known before . . . two million Kampucheans—a quarter of the entire population—perished representing genocide on a scale never before witnessed in terms of a single country [and] rarely in history has the entire population of a nation been subjected to such bestial and inhuman treatment as that endured by the Kampuchean people under Pol Pot.⁷

In the same time frame, border incidents became frequent between Vietnam and Cambodia as Pol Pot's violent anti-Vietnamese propaganda intensified. That Cambodia was the initial aggressor appears now to be widely accepted. Prince Norodom Sihanouk, leader in exile of the Cambodian people, blamed the Khmer Rouge for provoking Vietnam.⁸ Klintworth states, "On all the evidence and on the balance of probabilities it seems reasonable to say that the Khmer Rouge were first to use force and that they went out of their way to provoke the Vietnamese."

The author traces the origins of the war between Cambodia and Vietnam and examines Vietnam's attempts to negotiate a settlement.

^{4.} G. KLINTWORTH, VIETNAM'S INVERVENTION IN CAMBODIA IN INTERNATIONAL Law 1 (1989).

^{5.} Id. at 6.

^{6.} *Id*. at 0

^{7.} Id. at 6-7.

^{8.} Id. at 18.

^{9.} Id.

These attempts were rejected by the Cambodian government. According to journalist Wilfred Burchett, Vietnam tried to secure a mediation mission from the United Nations and was apparently "blocked by China." In his book *The China Cambodia Vietnam Triangle*, Burchett revealed that China exerted pressure to scuttle a Non-Aligned good offices mission to assist the warring states, 11 and even lobbied extensively but unsuccessfully to have Vietnam expelled from the Non-Aligned Movement. 12 Burchett found another Chinese motivation for its support of Pol Pot:

Whereas Vietnam had stubbornly refused to be placed in China's pocket, Pol Pot had jumped into it himself. China has been charged on many occasions with being interested in fighting the United States to the last Vietnamese and was certainly no less averse to fighting Vietnam to the last Kampuchean.¹³

Burchett and Klintworth present compelling evidence of the extent of Chinese involvement in Cambodian affairs during the Pol Pot regime. That China should have lent such extensive support to a regime practicing genocide is not very surprising now in view of the Chinese government's bloody massacre of its own citizens during the 1989 Tienanmen Movement.

Clearly, Vietnam had no choice but to repel Cambodian forces which were inflicting heavy casualties on Vietnamese civilians in the border villages. Vietnamese statistics, cited by Klintworth, indicate that between 1977 and 1978 the Khmer Rouge destroyed twenty-five townships and ninety-six villages. Between 250,000 and 300,000 people lost their homes and the death toll of Vietnamese soldiers was 30,000.¹⁴

Klintworth's careful research of the evidence leads him to conclude quite convincingly that Vietnam's Christmas Day invasion of Cambodia in 1978 and its destruction of the Pol Pot government in twelve days was "a reasonable act of self-defence." Given Cambodia's aggressive attacks and the Chinese attempt to block peaceful initiatives through the United Nations, Vietnam had little room to maneuver. The extent of Chinese support for the Cambodian regime of Pol Pot might have dictated caution in the minds of Vietnam's leaders, but the provocation from Cambodia was too great for them. The relative ease with which Vietnam destroyed the Pol Pot government testifies to the lack of support for that regime among its own people.

The crucial issue of international law posed in this book is not whether Vietnam's invasion constitutes self-defense. The controversial aspect of this study stems from the author's commitment to the view that the Vietnamese invasion can be considered an example of humanitarian

^{10.} W. Burchett, The China Cambodia Vietnam Triangle 161 (1981).

^{11.} Id.

^{12.} Id. at 162.

^{13.} Id. at 149.

^{14.} G. KLINTWORTH, supra note 4, at 23-24.

^{15.} Id. at 28.

intervention. While admitting that "Vietnam has not been a strong proponent of such an argument in its invasion and occupation of Kampuchea," Klintworth believes that "... Vietnam's use of force to overthrow the Khmer Rouge meets, on the whole, all the criteria for an excusable humanitarian intervention." ¹⁷

Klintworth makes out a persuasive case for his rather controversial thesis. His testing criteria for determining whether Vietnam's actions qualify as humanitarian intervention are:

- "The human rights threatened ought to be fundamental ones."
- 2. "There should be a situation of extreme deprivation that shocks the conscience of mankind." ¹⁹
- 3. "There should be a sustained large-scale loss of life or imminent risk of a continuation thereof; it should not be an isolated incident."²⁰
- 4. "The state authorities ought to be unable or unwilling to prevent the violation of human rights."²¹
- 5. There should be consent, but it is not mandatory.²²
- 6. There "should have been a failure to act by the United Nations." 23
- 7. "Other peaceful alternatives had been tried and failed, leaving [the intervening state] with few options."²⁴
- 8. "The invading state should be impartial and disinterested"25
- 9. "The proportionality rule: [there should be] minimum impact on authority structures, though this may be unavoidable." 26
- 10. "The operation should be limited and as non-coercive and neutral as possible."²⁷
- 11. There should be "[a] prompt disengagement "28
- 12. There should be "[s]upervision by and reporting to the United Nations."29

To prove that Vietnam's action qualifies as humanitarian intervention, Klintworth draws on both primary and secondary sources. His conclusions about the gruesome nature of the Pol Pot regime are now

^{16.} Id. at 41.

^{17.} Id. at 76.

^{18.} Id. at 60.

^{19.} Id. at 63.

^{20.} Id.

^{21.} Id. at 64.

^{22.} Id. at 65.

^{23.} Id. at 66.

^{24.} Id. at 67.

^{25.} Id. at 68.

^{26.} Id. at 70.

^{20. 14.} at 10.

^{27.} Id. at 71.

^{28.} Id. at 73. 29. Id. at 74.

universally believed. That the conscience of the world has been shocked is now amply evident. The sheer madness of a government which terrorized people simply because they wore glasses almost defies comprehension. Accounts of numbers vary but the range of the massacres is so vast and the victims (now nothing but heaps of skulls and bones) are so numerous that all the world should feel responsible for letting such barbarity continue without intervention.

Motivating the killings was the following policy of the Khmer Rouge: "[i]n the new Kampuchea, one million people will suffice to continue the revolution. One million good revolutionaries will be enough for the society that we are building. The others we do not need."³⁰ The main annual killing season was in July, after the harvest.³¹ "The worst wave of executions took place in 1978 and continued throughout the year as tension with Vietnam intensified and internal resistance increased."³² Careful records were kept by the Pol Pot Government with details of interrogations, torture confessions, and executions. The victims were routinely photographed. These pictures reveal that a number of women and children were declared enemies of the state. Pictures also show that foreigners were not exempt. There is pictorial evidence of two Australians, one Indian and one American—all victims of the Khmer Rouge.³³

One reason why the world showed little interest in this tragedy was that the Pol Pot Government had cut off most information links to the outside world. Telephone, cable, and airline connections were severed. Few foreign journalists ventured into Cambodia.

Wilfred Burchett's conclusions about the lack of available information match those of Klintworth. Burchett recounted a meeting with a Yugoslavian diplomat at the Belgrade Conference of the Non-Aligned Movement in July 1978. The Yugoslavian diplomat, Milan Marcovich stated that his country was "the best placed in the West to know" about events in Cambodia because the Yugoslavs had "maintained an embassy there all the time." He then told Burchett about mutual friends who had been killed by the Khmer Rouge. Burchett commented:

What was extraordinary at Belgrade—and in February 1979 at a meeting of the Non-Aligneds' Coordinating Bureau in Maputo (Mozambique) and even more so at the Non-Aligneds' summit in Havana in September 1979—was that Yugoslavia took the lead in stubbornly defending the Pol Pot Regime. It continued to do so later at the United Nations. That the "best informed" Western country would do this is explainable only by Yugoslavia's intimate relations with the United States and its new-found friendship with China. 36

^{30.} Id. at 64.

^{31.} Id.

^{32.} Id.

^{33.} Id. at 65.

^{34.} Id. at 67.

^{35.} W. BURCHETT, supra note 10, at 161-62.

^{36.} Id. at 162.

United Nations inaction was serious enough; U.N. actions are even more questionable. The United Nations has voted to give the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK)—which includes the ousted Khmer Rouge—the Cambodian seat in the United Nations. According to Klintworth:

The Khmer Rouge comprise a major part of the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK) formed in 1982 and has been allocated the Cambodian seat at the United Nations ever since. It was only in November 1988 that the United Nations General Assembly included a reference in its annual resolution on the situation in Kampuchea to the non-return to Cambodia of the Khmer Rouge policies and practices of 1975-78.³⁷

In such cases of genocide, Klintworth concludes, the U.N. has failed to take effective action. "The performance of the United Nations has been negative, evasive and protective of the offending government"38

One of the main arguments advanced by opponents of Vietnam's intervention refers to that nation's alleged desire to Vietnamize Cambodia. Critics have pointed to Vietnam's historic interest in Cambodia, the long duration of its involvement in this particular conflict and its apparent desire to ensure the survival of a pro-Vietnamese government in Cambodia. Klintworth disagrees and believes that ". . . there is little evidence of an attempt by Vietnam to colonize or Vietnamize Cambodia." He argues that the scale of the Cambodian disaster necessitated extensive Vietnamese involvement in rebuilding the country. As he explains:

Some of the claims of Vietnamization of Cambodia may be due to the fact that Vietnam initially had to run a country that had been virtually turned upside down. Its infrastructure had been destroyed. When the Vietnamese arrived in 1979 Cambodia's schools and hospitals were neglected and their grounds overgrown "like forests." Phnom Penh was an empty city. Its central bank had been blown up, shops and villas had been smashed and looted, factories were at a standstill and the streets were knee-deep in broken furniture and rubble: "It was a wasteland of decaying and melancholy buildings drowning in garbage." Vietnam had to provide administrators, teachers, doctors, engineers and skilled personnel because almost the entire Kampuchean technical and intellectual class had been eliminated by the Khmer Rouge. Too much of Kampuchea's culture, agriculture, industry, morale and spirit had been destroyed. There was no infrastructure, no currency, no markets, no banks, no transport, no trains, no telephones, no electricity, and the like. Of Kampuchea's 20,000 teachers only 7,000 survived; and of its 450 or so doctors only 45 remained.40

While Klintworth's evidence generally applies well to the twelve criteria he sets forth, he does admit there are flaws in the argument. As

^{37.} G. KLINTWORTH, supra note 4, at 66.

^{38.} Id. at 67.

^{39.} Id. at 69.

^{40.} Id. at 69-70 (citation omitted).

regards the proportionality rule, for example, Klintworth argues that "Vietnam's response was unquestionably disproportionate." Klintworth feels that the serious human rights violations must be factored in when assessing proportionality. He concludes that "[t]he extraordinary circumstances in Kampuchea called for an extraordinary solution." 42

The most serious flaw in the argument justifying this invasion as a humanitarian intervention relates to the lengthy duration of the Vietnamese military presence in Cambodia. Despite repeated calls by the United Nations for a withdrawal of Vietnamese forces, the latter have remained in Cambodia since the invasion, and "[s]ome analysts believe as many as 8,000 to 10,000 combat troops have returned" to support the pro-Vietnamese government of Hun Sen which is engaged in warfare against the Khmer Rouge operating along the border with Thailand.43 It does not appear likely that Vietnam will disengage militarily from Cambodian affairs while there is even a remote possibility that the dreaded Khmer Rouge might return to power. Klintworth explains, this apprehension about a return of the Khmer Rouge has given Vietnam justification for remaining in Cambodia. "Khmer Rouge access to sanctuaries in Thailand, and the provision of supplies of money and weapons from China, the United States and Singapore have enabled the Khmer Rouge to survive as a threat to both Vietnam's security and to the Kampuchean people."44

Though there is growing international recognition that the genocidal Khmer Rouge must not be allowed to return to power, the very presence of Khmer Rouge delegates at peace initiatives blocks all hopes for a viable solution. British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher voiced international concern during her August 1988 visit to a refugee camp near the Cambodian border. She said "[t]he Vietnamese must go, but we must not allow the return of the terrible Pol Pot regime in their place. No civilized country could accept that."45 However, recent peace initiatives in Jakarta, Indonesia broke down largely because of a Khmer Rouge veto.⁴⁶ Khmer Rouge Leader, Khieu Samphan, "often described as the 'acceptable face' of the reviled Khmer Rouge,"47 scuttled the serious attempt to solve the Cambodian crisis. As Bryan Johnson of the Toronto Globe and Mail commented of the Khmer Rouge, "[a]lthough they now pay lip service to liberal democracy, nothing in their demeanor indicates a fundamental change."48 Earlier, a Cambodian hospital administrator told Johnson, "if you had lived under Pol Pot, you would

^{41.} Id. at 70.

^{42.} Id. at 71.

^{43.} Globe and Mail (Toronto), Mar. 3, 1990, at D3, col. 1.

^{44.} G. KLINTWORTH, supra note 4, at 73.

^{45.} The Times (London), Aug. 8, 1988, at 6, col. 1.

^{46.} Globe and Mail (Toronto), Mar. 3, 1990, at D3, col. 1.

^{47.} Id.

^{48.} Id.

understand that it is a nightmare we cannot keep away."49

Klintworth believes that "Cambodians have been relatively well disposed towards the Vietnamese army: any opposition seems to have been subsumed beneath the greater fear that the Khmer Rouge could return." He also feels that the long tenure of Vietnamese involvement was caused by circumstances beyond Vietnam's control which made a prompt withdrawal impossible. "[A]nybody who has been to Cambodia can only give credit to the achievements of the Vietnamese administration and the accompanying progress of the PRK government in restoring order, life, independence and hope to the country." Vietnamese moves to overthrow the Pol Pot regime were supported by the people of Cambodia who are now fearful about an imminent return this year, 1990, of the hated Khmer Rouge.

While Klintworth's plea on behalf of Vietnam is eloquent and persuasive, it may not exert a major influence on the minds of policy makers either in the large countries or even among Vietnam's Asian neighbors. True, the revealed atrocities have caused some embarrassment to those countries supporting the Khmer Rouge. China, once Pol Pot's most staunch supporter, no longer assumes that the Khmer Rouge will dominate Cambodia,⁵² only that, as a faction, the Khmer Rouge could participate in a proposed quadripartite government which would also include Prince Sihanouk.⁵³ Furthermore, China has recently not "objected in principle to . . . [an] enhanced United Nations role"⁵⁴

However, revulsion against the Khmer Rouge has not yet translated into universal applause for Vietnam's action in saving the Cambodians, nor is this likely in the near future. The invasion is still often referred to as an act of aggression. While Klintworth's scholarship will undoubtedly increase awareness of the issues, acceptance of his claim that Vietnamese actions can be deemed humanitarian intervention may not be forthcoming for quite some time.

In his recent book, Humanitarian Intervention: An Inquiry into Law and Morality, Fernando R. Tesón suggested that "humanitarian intervention is consistent with the present international legal order." Tesón defined humanitarian intervention as "the proportionate transboundary help, including forcible help, provided by governments to individuals in another state who are being denied basic human rights and who themselves would be rationally willing to revolt against their oppressive government." Klintworth's conclusion that "[t]here may . . . be a legal and moral obligation on neighboring states to intervene, on the basis of

^{49.} Globe and Mail (Toronto), Sept. 12, 1989, at A1.

^{50.} G. KLINTWORTH, supra note 4, at 72.

^{51.} Id. at 77.

^{52.} The Times (London), July 16, 1988, at 9, col. 1.

^{53.} N.Y. Times, Feb. 27, 1990, at A6, col. 1.

^{54.} Id

^{55.} F. Tesón, Humanitarian Intervention: An Inquiry into Law and Morality 5 (1988).

^{56.} Id.

a higher universal morality that transcends the boundaries of parochial state interests,"⁵⁷ is similar to Tesón's view:

[F]oreign armies are morally entitled to help victims of oppression in overthrowing dictators, provided that the intervention is proportionate to the evil which it is designed to suppress. A further requirement is that the intervention be welcomed, actually or ideally, by those citizens whose human rights are being violated.⁵⁸

With some reservations concerning the proportionality rule, Tesón's criteria would appear to fit the evidence presented by Klintworth.

Tesón provided analyses of the Indian intervention in East Pakistan (1971), the Tanzanian intervention in Uganda (1979), the French intervention in Central Africa (1979), and the U.S. intervention in Grenada (1983), and he commented on Cambodia: "While cases like Amin's Uganda and Pol Pot's Cambodia are clear instances of situations warranting humanitarian intervention, oppression need not reach those proportions to warrant foreign-supported overthrow." 59

Notwithstanding Tesón's interesting observation on Cambodia and humanitarian intervention, it remains to be seen whether Klintworth's scholarship will convince the majority of international lawyers to upgrade the Vietnam-Cambodia case to the level of humanitarian intervention. Klintworth predicts that "eventually, Vietnam's intervention in Kampuchea may be judged to have been essentially justifiable. It may even become a useful comparative model for future instances of forceful humanitarian intervention." 60

As a book which is clearly favorable to the Vietnamese case, this study may attract criticism from those committed to the long-established tradition of hostility to Vietnamese actions in Southeast Asia. Such actions are perceived to be expansionist, aggressive, and destabilizing to the region. However, the book is worthy of attention in that it presents a different perspective and should therefore, at least, be considered for its alternate viewpoint. One cannot dispute its basic premise that the Vietnamese invasion (whatever its original motivation) did succeed in ending the genocidal nightmare of the Pol Pot Regime. Perhaps some new perceptions are overdue in evaluating the complex politics of South East Asian nations.

The book would have been enhanced by a detailed analysis of Gorbachev's policies toward Vietnam, China, and Cambodia. Gorbachev's overtures for closer ties with the Asia-Pacific region drew world attention after his very significant speech in Vladivostok in July 1986. The Soviet leader explained his nation's hopes for improved relations with Asia and the Pacific nations.⁶¹ His efforts to improve Sino-

^{57.} G. KLINTWORTH, supra note 4, at 110.

^{58.} F. Tesón, supra note 55, at 15.

^{59.} Id. at 117.

^{60.} G. KLINTWORTH, supra note 4, at 112.

^{61.} See generally The Soviet Union and the Asia-Pacific Region (P. Thambipillai & D. Matuszewski, eds. 1989).

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Soviet relations have undoubtedly had an impact on Vietnam and on Cambodia. Klintworth could have considered the Vladivostok speech in detail. The ensuing process of Soviet diplomacy may have generated some apprehension in Vietnam and possibly exerted indirect pressure on Vietnam to withdraw from Cambodia.⁶²

Klintworth ends his interesting book with a clear endorsement of the Vietnamese role in Cambodia and of the Vietnamese achievement in rebuilding a shattered society. Recent events since Klintworth's book was published reveal the essential fragility of Cambodian society: the Vietnamese are still not completely out of the country (whether or not they wish to withdraw); the dreaded Khmer Rouge is still an active player; and the civil war drags on, exacting its toll in human lives each day. The future is unpredictable and frightening for the men, women, and children of that long-suffering nation. As Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas commented about Cambodia: "Now there is nothing certain at all. No one has any idea what will happen next." 63

^{62.} Id. at 138.

^{63.} Globe and Mail (Toronto), Mar. 3, 1990, at D3, col. 1.